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August 21, 1894.

No. 891.

\$2.50
a Year.

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY BEADLE AND ADAMS.
No. 98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Price,
5 cents.

Vol. XXXV.



Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Dead-Sure Game; OR, PISTOL POLLY of NUGGETVILLE.

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AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

ROSY POSY AND THE TOWN HALL.

THEY called it Rosy Posy—this thriving mining-camp.

Not a very startling name, as the names of mining-camps generally run, but it answered the purpose.

It was not what might be termed a bonanza town, nor yet a mushroom sprung from any

"GET UP HERE, AND PUT UP YOUR PAWS!" CRIED DEADWOOD DICK, AT THE SAME TIME PULLING ON THE LARIAT.

H. W. PRAY,
Norwood, R. I.

particular boom, yet it was withal a lively settlement that considered itself of some importance.

Rosy Posy snuggled at the bottom of a rugged mountain gulch, the latter a kind of golden belt that extended for some distance in both directions from the camp, holding out rich inducements to the brawny wielders of pick and shovel almost anywhere along the bottom.

Here, then, lay the reason why Rosy Posy existed as the thriving camp described.

It was not much of a city—in fact, it appeared but a small village to the stranger who looked upon it for the first time before entering.

Generally, it did not take more than twenty-four hours to convince the aforesaid stranger that it was about the biggest place of its size that he had ever struck in his life.

Rosy Posy boasted of only one hotel, the "Big Hen" by appellation, but it had several saloons, chief among which was the "Prohibitionist Headquarters." Then there were a couple of general-supply stores, a banking and exchange office with an Express Office in connection, and the post-office.

"But, greatest of all, Rosy Posy had a brand new Town Hall, recently finished, which was pointed out to the new-comer with pride—pardonable pride, for not another camp in the gulch had anything that could begin to compare with it!

True, Nuggetville, further down the gulch, could boast of a school-house, and Satan's Pocket, above, of a church, but when it came to the matter of a public hall, these towns were not in it.

This public institution was the outcome of a thought born in the fertile brain of Marshal Mackerel, the mayor of the camp.

When the school-house at Nuggetville was announced, Rosy Posy turned a glance of envy in that direction; and when, later, it was heralded that Satan's Pocket had a church, then the galoots of Rosy Posy awoke to the fact that something had to be done, and that in a hurry.

Now the above-mentioned Marshal Mackerel was high-cockdorum of the town, both by right of office and because he was a particularly "bad" man—or was so held to be, and his people demanded of him that he should do something that would put the rival camps away back in the shade; so, when the mayor had worn his thinking-cap for a day or two, he made the proposition that they should build a Town Hall, a suggestion that was hailed with a whoop of delight.

"You see," the mayor explained, "ef we have a Town Hall we ar' bound to git all the shows and sech that come this way, and Nuggetville and Satan's Pocket will have to take a back seat. Our kids have ter go to Nuggetville to school, and our wimmin all the way to Satan's Pocket fer their churchin; and now, by scat, we'll make them come to us fer their 'musement!'"

The marshal's proposition was sustained, and it was so ordered—with a vim that awoke the echoes in the gulch.

And the outcome was, as said, the Town Hall, all complete and ready for business or pleasure, just as the order of the day might be; but, now that it was done, it began to look as if it would prove to be a white elephant on their hands.

It had been opened formally, of course, but on that occasion not a man from either Satan's Pocket or Nuggetville had honored Rosy Posy with his presence, and the denizens of the latter place had to chew the cud of their chagrin with the best grace possible.

There was the Town Hall, but, what were they going to do with it?

Vexing question!

One day, when the stage was late and all the idlers of the camp were lounging around in front of the hotel and saloons awaiting its arrival, one Barth Dimund put that question to the mayor bluntly.

"What ar' we goin' to do with that Town Hall?" he demanded.

"I kalkylate we'll have to git up a play o' some sort, out o' home talent," was the off-hand answer.

"You hev hit et, by ther great gosh-away!" cried Dimund, struck hard with the idea. "We'll talk et over an' see what kin be done. But, no time now, fer hyer comes ther hearse."

The stage was coming at last.

More than that, it was bringing with it a personage who could and would make use of the new Town Hall to better advantage than the mayor's thought could have made possible.

With the usual swing and flourish the "hearse" drew up in front of the Big Hen and stopped.

The passengers alighted forthwith—such as were booked for this place, for the stage ran on to Nuggetville and as a general thing some of the passengers went through with it.

This was not the fault of the people of Rosy Posy. They generally gave out the report that Nuggetville was not much of a town, and if they—the passengers—had any respect for themselves they would stop at Rosy Posy and be done with it; and, this sometimes had the desired effect.

On this occasion all the passengers save one got out at Rosy Posy.

The exception was a young woman, riding inside, who merely put her head out and inquired:

"Gentlemen, is this Nuggetville?"

"Nuggetville!" roared the mayor, promptly. "Don't insult us, lady. Nuggetville can't hold a candle to this place."

"I beg your pardon sir; I didn't know."

"Then it's time ye did, by scat!" said the mayor, doffing his hat and stepping forward, speaking in a kindly manner. "Do you mean to tell us that you are goin' to Nuggetville?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I s'pose you know what you ar' doin', but if you ar' merely out for pleasure, and don't know the place, I would offer ther proposition that you stop off right hyer and hang up yer hat at Rosy Posy. I don't want to run down my neighbors, but you might go further an' fare wuss, ye know."

"I am not on pleasure, sir, but business, and I understand that Nuggetville has a school-house—"

"An' you ar' a schoolmarm?"

"Oh, no," smiling; "I teach dancing—"

"Oh! ka-whoop, ka-whoop!" yelled the mayor, wildly.

"Why, sir, what is the matter?" asked the young woman, her eyes open wide in wonderment.

"You ar' a dancin'-master?"

"Well, yes—or that is, I teach dancing."

"An' I take et you ar' lookin' fer a locate, a place where you kin open a school?"

"That is just my plan, sir."

"Oh! ka-whoop, ka-whoop, ka-whoop-ee! Somebody hold me! Barth Dimund, do ye hear what she says?"

"Yes, I'm takin' et in, marshal."

The young woman looked from the one to the other, a puzzled expression upon her countenance.

Marshal Mackerel turned to her again instantly.

"And you wanted ter git the use of the school-house at Nuggetville fer that purpose, hey?"

"Yes, sir."

"And open a evenin' school fer dancin', of course."

"That is the idea, sir. Do you think I can get the school-house for that purpose?"

"Why, bless yer heart, gallie, that 'ar school-house at Nuggetville ain't no bigger'n a cigar box sot up on its side, w' winders an' doors cut in, an' thar wouldn't be room in et fer Big-foot Ben hyer to turn round."

He jerked his thumb in the direction of a big fellow who stood near.

The young lady had to laugh merrily, as she surveyed the size of this man's stogies with a swift glance.

"Well, have you anything better you can offer, sir?" she asked.

"Lady, jest look 'e thar!"

With a step backward Marshal Mackerel spread out his hand with a flourish in the direction of the new Town Hall.

The young woman had to put her head further out in order to see the building, and as soon as she beheld it an exclamation of admiration sprung to her lips.

"My! What is it, sir?"

"That's our new Town Hall, gallie, as spick, span an' clean as a new pin, you bet!"

"And do you mean that I may have that building for the purpose of opening a dancing-school? I can hardly believe you mean it, sir."

"Thet 'ar's jest what I do mean, though, none ther less," the mayor declared. "This hyer's the place you ar' lookin' fer, lady, and you couldn't 'a' found a finer buildin'—no, by scat, not ef you had et made to order!"

CHAPTER II.

ANTICIPATING A BIG BLOW-OUT.

THERE was a whoop from the crowd, and without further parley the young woman alighted from the stage.

She was not more than eighteen at most, with a well-rounded figure and a pretty face, with a fresh, rosy complexion. She had laughing eyes, and a wealth of brown hair that fell upon her shoulders in profusion.

She wore a jaunty hat, and her dress was of serviceable material, semi-masculine in cut, as far as waist and jacket were concerned, while the skirt, of ample fold, was just short enough to disclose her shapely feet to good advantage. Altogether, she was a charming specimen of her sex.

"I accept your offer, sir," she said extending her hand as soon as she was on the ground. "I take it that you are the mayor of the town."

"You have hit et right on ther head," declared the mayor, taking the proffered hand.

"And this is the leading hotel?"

She indicated the Big Hen, as soon as she could disengage her shapely hand out of the mayor's rough grasp.

"That's what et ar', gallie," the assurance.

"We call et ther Big Hen."

"What a name! Why do you call it that?"

"Because thar's plenty of room under its wings, ma'm," spoke up the proprietor of the "shebang" himself, from the steps.

Again the girl's merry laugh rung out, and the stage having by this time been relieved of all the mail and Express matter it had brought for Rosy Posy, the driver was prepared to go on to his destination.

"Wull, ye have got about all I had," he declared, "including ther pootiest gal that ever got aboard this hyer old hearse. Shouldn't wonder ef thar was a ruction over to Nuggetville when they come ter find out about et, boys. But, that ain't no funeral o' mine, you bet!"

"That's what's ther matter," agreed Marshal Mackerel. "If they want any infermashun about et, send 'em to me, Jonas."

"That's what I'll do, sure."

The driver cracked his whip, at that, and the stage went lumbering on down through the gulch, while Marshal Mackerel politely conducted the fair stranger up the steps and into the hotel.

"You'll find us plain an' homely, miss," he made apology, "but we ar' all heart, every inch."

"All what ain't feet," muttered Big-foot Ben, aside.

Mackerel led the way right into the bar-

room, which answered the purpose of office as well, and the young woman followed him with that easy and careless air which is found to perfection nowhere else than in the wild and woolly West.

Joseph Juchert, the proprietor, had preceded them into the room and had already stationed himself behind the desk where he kept the register.

And the register, by the way, was a home-made affair.

The girl was really the coolest of the three, and she took up the pen and set down her name with a flourish that a master of penmanship might envy.

"There you have it," she said lightly, shoving the register from her. "Now my room, if you please, and I'll wash up and take a rest, for I am badly in need of both, I assure you."

The name she had penned was:

LUCY LOVE.

"That 'ar's a lovely name, darn me ef it ain't!" declared the mayor, as soon as his eyes took it in. "'Most as lovely as its owner, by scat!"

"No flattery, please," chided the young woman. "Here are some handbills and posters, by the way," taking them from the grip she carried. "You can oblige me by filling in the blanks and handing them around."

The mayor took them eagerly, and while the pretty stranger went off to her room he, the mayor, turned to his friend Dimund.

"What d'ye say now?" he demanded. "Ain't we right in et? Well, I should say so, by scat! We'll advertise at Nuggetville and Satan's Pocket; that'll be our first move, you bet."

The whole camp was filled with suppressed excitement.

Lucy Love's name was passed from lip to lip, and every man jack of them began to calculate upon the cost of dancing-lessons.

There was a general inspection of old stogies, and tallow was at a premium for the rest of the day. It was safe to prophesy that the dancing-school would be a success.

Very little if any attention had been paid to the other passengers who had arrived by the same stage.

One of these was a young man, perhaps twenty-four years of age.

There was nothing about him to attract more than passing notice, yet a close observer would have noted that he was handsome, with a fearless face and a pair of eyes that it would have been hard to surpass.

He wore a slouch hat, blue shirt with a tie knotted at the throat, plain jean trousers and rough but shapely boots, into the legs of which the mentioned trousers terminated. He had a mustache, and if he carried anything in the way of weapons they were not to be seen.

This stranger was a very quiet, unassuming fellow, and when he registered at the Big Hen, some time after the young lady had done so, the few who cared enough about him to learn his name found that he had written it Dick Bristol.

It was not until supper time that Lucy Love put in her appearance again, and then she showed herself upon the piazza of the hotel immediately after the meal.

Dick Bristol was there smoking a cigar.

"Ah! do I find you here, sir?" the young lady greeted him.

"I guess you do," was the smiling answer. "It appears to me this is my corporeal self."

"Ha! ha! To be sure; but I thought you were going to Nuggetville, and it appears this place is a mile or more short of there. Did you change your mind?"

"Yes."

"Then your business was not pressing you?"

"Well, no; the fact of the matter is, I have no business; I am merely putting in time."

"Do you mean you are out of employ?"

"That's putting it into plain English, Miss Love. I thought if this was a likely-looking enough place for you it ought to be for me, so I lighted off the same as you did."

The young woman had taken a seat within a few feet of him.

"Well, how would you like to engage with me?"

"With you?" with a show of surprise.

"That was what I said," smiling.

"What in the world could I do in your line? You want a partner to teach the art of dancing?"

"Ha! ha! Not at all, sir. I can do all the teaching; what I want is a manager and some one to preserve order, and I think you will fill the bill first rate if you'll try it."

"All right; I'll do it."

"The people here seem to take to the notion of a dancing-school."

"They'd be worse than heathen if they didn't, with yourself as teacher," was the gallant rejoinder to that.

"I see they are fixing up their new hall for me, and have made quite a display in front with the bills I gave them. No doubt there will be a great time here to-night when the school opens."

"Not a doubt of it, Miss Love. What's more, they have sent notices to the two neighboring camps, and there will probably be a general turnout from those places. Now that I am your manager, will you permit me to make a suggestion in your interest?"

"You certainly have that right, sir."

"Well, I would charge a good stiff admission fee, if I were you, and you will line your pocket well the first night."

"You may be right."

"I know I am right. Give it out that you will give the first lesson free, in order to form a good class, but charge an admission into the hall, for everybody will be eager to see the class formed."

"That's true; I wish I had had you for manager long ago, Mr. Bristol. Will you attend to it for me?"

"Certainly; but, how came you to choose me for this service?"

"I like your face; and then, too, the way you handled that insulting fellow at the last relay station, on our way here, gave me confidence in you. I must thank you again for that service."

"Pshaw! do not mention it again; it was nothing. I'm sorry I'm not better dressed for the honorable position you have given me, Miss Love, but I'll try to take care of your interests all the same. Hello! what have we here? Looks as if it might be a delegation from Nuggetville, and I'll bet that's what it is, too."

CHAPTER III.

THE DELEGATION FROM NUGGETVILLE.

DICK BRISTOL and Deadwood Dick, Jr., are names synonymous.

Hence there is no need to say to the reader that this man was none other than the Deadwood Dick, Jr., famed in romance.

He it was, but a stranger in this town of Rosy Posy—in fact, he was unknown in this section at the time of which we write, though his name and fame were no stranger there.

That he was here on business may be taken for granted.

But, to the matter in hand.

As he spoke, Dick called attention to a number of men who were approaching up the gulch in a body.

They were coming with a stride that seemed to bespeak business, and were excitedly talking and gesticulating among themselves as they approached, and through a force of habit Deadwood Dick felt to make sure his weapons were on call.

"Hillo! what's this hyer?"

So demanded Marshal Mackerel, just then appearing from the bar-room.

He had turned in the direction of the young woman on the piazza, but noting the direction of her gaze and Dick's, had followed it.

"It looks like a delegation coming here on business, sir," said Dick, in answer to the inquiry.

"Wull, they'll find us to home, I kalky-late," the mayor snarled.

"And the latch-string out, eh?"

"You bet!"

The men from Nuggetville—for as such they were recognized—were now near at hand, and in a moment more one of the number called out:

"Come right out hyer an' show yerself, Marshal Mackerel, fer we hev come on business, you kin jest bet on't! Come right out hyar, an' tell us what ye mean by sech—"

"Shut up!" thundered the mayor. "What's the matter with you?"

"Matter enough, by hokus!"

"Well, spit out what you've got to say, and done with it. If you have come hyer fer trouble you'll git all you want, you kin 'pend on't."

"We have come to demand a 'splanation from you, that's what we have come fer, an' you kin bet that Bill Milligin means business this hyer time, sure as my name is Abe Arnold!"

"What do you want me to explain?"

"Why you robbed ther stage of passengers what intended to come to Nuggetville, an' what had paid their fair clean through, by hokus!"

"You ar' talkin' through your hat, you confounded walkin' distillery o' bad bug-juice, you!" stormed Marshal Mackerel, allowing his ire to rise. "We have taken no passengers from the stage."

"You li— That is ter say, ef, ef that's ther case we hev been misinformed on ther subject," was sharply begun but quickly modified, upon the mayor's reaching for a gun. "That's jest what we have come hyer to find out about, Marshal Mackerel, an' Bill Milligin wants ter know."

"Then why didn't he come and find out?"

"He sent us."

"And suppose it was so, what would he do about it?"

"By hokus, he's comin' over hyer in force an' clean you out, Town Hall and all, and don't you forget et!"

"He is, hey? Well, you just trot back and tell him that he will find us to home, and with our guns loaded for bear, every time! We don't scare worth a cent, we don't, and he'll find it out so!"

Lucy Love had risen to her feet, somewhat excited, and now stepping to the edge of the piazza, she said:

"Will you let me explain this matter, sir?"

"Hillo! you ar' the gal what's goin' to larn these hyer galoots of Rosy Posy to dance, be ye? Darn me ef you ain't a posy yerself, an' no mistake!"

"Compliments are not called for, sir. I merely want to tell you that neither the mayor nor the people of this place are responsible for my having stopped here, and you cannot hold them to account for it."

"Then ther driver don't tell a straight story, that's all."

"What has he told?"

"That Marshal Mackerel coaxed ye off."

"Well, he did not. He merely called my attention to his new Town Hall, and finding it just such a building as I wanted, I accepted it."

"You wasn't the only passenger that was booked through, though."

"I am the other, sir," spoke up Deadwood Dick, "and you may as well understand right here that you have no claim upon me, none whatever. I go where I please, when I please, and how I please, and I ce

tainly owe nothing to your town of Nuggetville."

"You talk big caliber fer a little gun, sonny."

Dick smiled in his grim fashion.

"If you don't want to take my word for it, come and measure," he invited. "I am open to inspection. If you fellows came here for trouble, you are likely to get into it, clear up to your ears."

"You come out hyer," roared Abe Arnold—as he called himself, "an' see what trouble you will git into!"

"There is no occasion for any trouble for anybody," spoke up Lucy Love, desirous of making peace. "I certainly had the right to stop off here at Rosy Posy if I so elected, and I acted upon my rights. Let me extend a cordial invitation to your people at Nuggetville to be present at the opening of my dancing-school this evening."

"At a dollar a head," chipped in Deadwood Dick.

"We'll be hyer, don't you doubt et," asserted the baffled spokesman for the delegation from Nuggetville. "We'll be hyer, an' et won't be no dollar a head, nuther, you bet!"

"No dollar, no dance," taunted Dick.

"We'll show ye, blast ye! Say, who be you, anyhow, young feller?"

"Well, I wasn't much of anybody half an hour ago, but now I hold the office of business manager to this lady."

The mayor, as well as the delegates, looked at the speaker in something of surprise, as did also Joe Juchert, Barth Dimund, and others; and Abe Arnold broke out into a laugh.

"Wull, you ar' a daisy-lookin' duke fer a manager, you ar'!" he cried. "You don't look as if you could manage a side-show to a penny circus, you don't."

Deadwood Dick flushed, and to the young lady he whispered:

"You see how it is; my appearance brings disgrace upon you, Miss Love."

"Do not let that trouble you, sir," was the spirited answer. "I know you for what you are—a gentleman."

"Ha! what do you know about—"

He was not allowed to finish, for just at that moment a chunk of turf, thrown by Abe Arnold, caught him in the neck with some force.

"Let's see what you are good fer, anyhow," the chief of the delegation cried as he flung it. "If you have got the spirit of a cow you will paw up dirt and bellow, at this my opinion of you! Ha-ha-ha!"

And the others laughed with him.

Dick coolly shook the dirt from his neck and shirt, and started down the steps.

"Take care, sir," cautioned the young lady. "There are five of them against you. But, there is the mayor with you, and no doubt all the rest. Still, take care of yourself."

Dick glanced at the girl, and their eyes met in a peculiar manner.

"Don't worry about me," he answered. "I could not put up with that, even if they were twenty-five against one."

He continued on down the steps, and out in the direction of where the five men from Nuggetville were standing, and these five had their hands at their hips, with guns in their grasp.

The mayor had already leaped from the porch, but hesitated, seeing that the five were ready to draw their weapons.

The others also hung back.

"Take care!" warned the mayor. "See what they're up to?"

"You keep out of it, sir, and let me deal with them," responded Dick, in a low tone.

He walked out to where the five were standing, with his thumbs thrust under his belt and with an air of utter carelessness and unconcern about him.

The five evidently knew not what to make of it, and their leader looked puzzled.

As he advanced, Dick stooped and grabbed up a fistful of sod, and continued straight on and up to the leader of the delegation, spite of the fact that the fellow drew his revolver.

"Keep off," the fellow warned, "or by hokus I'll give ye somethin' wuss'n a chunk o' dirt, by a mighty sight! D'ye hear? By ther Lord Harry ef I don't let 'er go at—Whoup! Ouch! Ugh! Splush—sh—!" And he ended with a choking sound that made the crowd laugh.

CHAPTER IV.

A STROKE FOR ROSY POSY.

DEADWOOD DICK had quietly and wisely weighed all the chances, and had taken action accordingly.

In the first place, he did not believe one of these fellows would dare to shoot, for if he did the chances were that they would never get out of the place alive.

After picking up the bunch of sod, Dick had walked straight on, and when within a couple of paces of the leader he made a leap.

The revolver was brushed aside, and, in that instant, the new-comer had Abe Arnold by the neck.

And in the same moment the clod of dirt was jammed into Abe's mouth.

It was quite probable that never before in his life had the fellow felt a grip like unto this of the young man into whose hands he had fallen, for the clutch on his throat almost paralyzed him.

He tried to utter a whoop, then he gave a squeal of pain, followed up with a grunt in the same breath; that was followed by a choking splutter that set the onlookers to laughing loudly at his expense.

The next moment Dick gave him a fling off that sent him upon his back.

Abe Arnold's friends had just awakened to the realization that their duty was to assist their partner in distress, and sprung forward to do so, but they were just a trifle too late.

"Back all of you!" and the manager confronted them with a brace of revolvers drawn.

Back they fell—every man of them with weapons in hand; but Deadwood Dick had the drop on them and they were helpless.

It was a rule that would not work both ways—at any rate they could not be certain that it would; if they had not dared to shoot Dick, for reasons given, they had no assurance that he would hesitate to shoot them.

"Kill him!" spluttered Abe Arnold, having got the clod out of his mouth.

"Go slow about it," cautioned Dick.

"Fill him full o' holes!"

"Don't try to, that's all."

"Make a porous plaster of his skin, by hokus!"

"Take care that you don't get converted into a porous plaster yourself."

Abe was scrambling to his feet, trying hard to see, for some of the dirt had got into his eyes as well.

By the time he got upon his pins he was able to take in the situation with one eye at least, and what he saw did not thrill him with delight.

"What yer mean by jammin' that inter my mouth?" he bellowed.

"Just what you meant by throwing a lump of the same at me, perhaps," Dick retorted. "Dose for dose is my law!"

"Blast ye, I've a notion ter chaw you all up! D'ye hear? Chaw ye all up, by hokus, an' spit ye out!"

"With a dirty mouth like that? Oh, no, thank you; I respectfully decline to be chawed. I'm not in the market for the chawin' process at present, my friend."

The crowd whooped with delight at the fellow's expense.

Dick did not for a moment relax his watch

upon the others, but kept them under cover while the Nuggetville delegate talked.

"You ar' a ding-dang rip-stavin' coward, that's what you ar'! D'ye know et? An' I kin chaw ye all up into little bits afore ye kin squeal, ef you'll put up that ar' gun!"

"You alarm me, sir—dreadfully!"

"Yas, an' I'll harm ye, too, by hokus! I'm a tiger right out of ther jungle, when ye git me mad, an' I'm half mad a'ready!"

"Is that so? I took you for a billy goat!"

At which the crowd whooped it up again, greatly to the disgust of Mr. Arnold, and his four comrades. The four put up their weapons.

"Come on, Abe! Le's git home!" one urged.

"Not by a ding-dang sight!" the Nuggetville gladiator bellowed. "Not till I have taken satisfaction out of the hide of this hyer striplin', you bet. Now I'm goin' fer your scalp, sonny!"

"Let me know when you have got it, will you?"

"You'll know et, by hokus! You kin bet you will. You jes' put up that 'ar gun, an' see what'll happen next!"

"All right! Just give up your weapons to Marshal Mackerel here, and I'll do the same, and then I'll be at your service."

"Do ye mean fair?"

"Nothing else."

"And I'll see to it that there is fair play," the mayor promised.

The crowd had circled, by this time, around the two men and the others from Nuggetville.

"Better a darn sight come home," again suggested one of the four. "We have got into a hornets' nest an' ther best thing ter do is to go out 'fore we git stung."

"There's horse sense for you," added Dick.

"I'm doin' this hyer," bellowed the would-be whacker. "You hold your jaw till I ax ye to put et in, Den Hiker. Come, young feller, put up that weepin an' let me git at ye, fer I'm dyin' now ter git a taste of yer blud."

"All right, I'll oblige you. You four get out of this ring, and some of my friends will keep an eye on you to see that you don't chip in. That's right; and now, Mr. Splurge, give up your weapons to the mayor."

"Hyer they ar'," growled Arnold, handing over his guns.

"And your knife, too," reminded Dick.

Such a weapon was forthcoming, and was surrendered, and the homely, bearded tough slightly pale, was ready for the fray.

"Mayor, here are my weapons, too, and now I'll do my best to uphold the credit of Rosy Posy," said Dick. "If I get the worst of it, just plant me under the willows by the brookside and scatter a few sunflower seeds around, will you?"

"No danger of your gettin' done up, I guess," laughed Mackerel.

"Thar ain't, hey?" roared ugly Abe. "I'll show him in jest about two holy seconds, by hokus! Take that fer a starter, dang ye!" and the bad man from Nuggetville led off with a rouser from the shoulder, but Bristol brushed it aside deftly.

"I'll show ye, blast ye! Take this hyer, then!" but again the blow was parried.

"Yes, but you don't get it in, Mr. Splurge. What's the matter with you? This is the way to do it."

And Dick let out his left, and head-over-heels went Mr. Abe Arnold, to the intense delight of all who were there to witness it—save the four.

Up he got, with a commingled roar and bellow, and at his foe he blindly rushed.

What happened would not be easy to describe. There was a swift commotion in which two pairs of arms and legs took prominent part, and when it was over Ugly Abe again lay upon his back.

Both eyes were fast closing up, his mouth was bleeding, his shirt was torn half off, and, taken altogether, he looked as if he had been having a tough tussle with a wild-cat, or worse.

While Dick, he stood with arms folded, not a mark upon him anywhere.

And the excited and delighted crowd cheered madly.

CHAPTER V.

NUGGETVILLE AND PISTOL POLLY.

"WELL, gentlemen, do you think he will do to take home?"

So asked Deadwood Dick, as soon as he could be heard, addressing the four others from Nuggetville.

"Ef he was done up any wuss, et wouldn't be worth while to take him at all," Den Hiker made answer. "Kin we borrow a shutter to carry him on, Mayor Mackerel?"

Again the crowd whooped and yelled, at this.

"We'd be most mighty mean, ter refuse that," responded the mayor. "Take your pick of shutters or doors, 'cept only them of ther Town Hall."

"And give our respects to Bill Milligin, your mayor," added Barth Dimund. "If he wants any further information from this quarter, tell him to apply in person next time, instead of sendin' sich delegates!"

"You ber darn!"

The four were in no amiable mood, but, wisely discreet they wanted only to get themselves out of a bad box.

A shutter was brought and the insensible gladiator was stretched out upon it on his back; then his four comrades laid hold upon it and bore him away down the gulch, the crowd giving them a parting cheer.

The mayor had surrendered the man's weapons, and also gave Deadwood Dick his revolvers.

"Give me your hand, boyee!" he exclaimed. "That 'ar was the neatest I ever seen done."

"That was nothing," said Dick, giving his hand. "That fellow was only a bag of wind."

"An' you ar' a sack o' sand, by scat!"

"You bet he ar'!"

"I hope no trouble will come out of it, for your camp here, mayor," Dick observed.

"Let 'em make trouble ef they want to," was the response. "Ef they want more of the same medicine, they know whar ther doctor's office is, I opine. But, what's yer name, pardner?"

"Dick Bristol."

"An' you ar' travelin' with this young lady?"

"Happened to come here by the same stage with her, that's all. She has employed me now, however, as her manager."

"Wull, ef she has hired you as her knock-out, I 'prove of her choice, by scat! We ar' goin' to keep order in the dancin'-school to-night, or know the reason why, you kin bet."

"Glad to hear you say it, mayor. That means that I am sure of your support in that direction."

"You bet."

Thus talking, they returned to the piazza and the crowd dispersed.

The young woman was standing there to welcome Dick and congratulate him, and the mayor sat down with them.

Meanwhile, the four men from Nuggetville were lugging their fallen champion wearily homeward.

Abe did not show any signs of regaining consciousness on the way, but he did show signs unmistakable of the rough treatment he had received.

"He ar' pooty bad used up, ain't he?" observed Den Hiker, once wher they stopped to rest.

"You ar' right he ar'," agreed Tom Yeter.

"An' I doubt whether Mayor Milligin will reckonize him," remarked one Dave Burdock, another of the four.

"Ef he don't, we'll have ter swear to his 'dentity, that's all," chimed in the fourth and last of the party—Mose Hefner.

The others laughed, and when they had rested and changed places around the improvised stretcher they continued on their way.

When they neared their destination they were discovered coming, and the word was quickly passed.

A crowd quickly gathered, in which Bill Milligin was prominent.

"They ar' luggin' in a dead man, sure as you live, mayor," one man declared positively.

"Et looks like et," the mayor agreed. "No doubt it's Abe Arnold, an' them cusses up at Rosy Posy must 'a' gi'n him his pill."

"An' ef et's so—"

"They'll git more pills of ther same kind 'n what they kin digest, an' don't you ferget et!"

"That's what's ther matter. Yes, et's Abe, sure enough, fer he is ther missin' man out of ther five. We'll soon know what's up, now."

About this time the laid-out man began to come to, and when the shutter was set down in front of the Bungalow Hotel, he sat up and tried to see.

"Wh—wh—whar is he?" he feebly demanded. "Let me finish him, by hokus, while I'm 'bout et! Let me at him again," scrambling to his feet and staggering around almost like a drunken man, "an' see ef I don't chaw him all to hash! Et's blud I want an' blud I'm goin' to have, you bet!"

"And it looks as if you had got a dose of it, too," assented the mayor, in a tone of disgust.

"What, you here, Milligin?" cried Abe.

"You darn fool! they have just brought you home on a shutter."

"Wh—what? Home on a shutter—me! Well, I guess not, by hokus! What ye talkin' 'bout?"

"If you could open your eyes so as to look around, you would know what I'm talking about. What's the meaning of this? What's happened, boys?"

"Wull," said Den Hiker, "et means that Abe went lookin' fer fight an' he found et; that's 'bout the size of et."

"Marshal Mackerel knocked him out?"

"No, et wasn't him."

"Who then?"

"Young feller what kem by ther stage, an' what seems to be partner with that pooty gal ther driver told us 'bout."

"That's et, hey? Well, I ruther opine that same feller will have a chance to take a fall out o' me this evenin', if nothin' bu'sts. We ar' goin' over thar, boyees, you bet!"

"An' they'll be ready fer us, too."

"Did they say so?"

"That's what they done, an' ther gal has sent a speshul invite fer Nuggetville to be present at ther openin' of her dancin'-school."

"We'll be thar, you bet!"

"Bet yer life we wull!" roared Arnold.

"We'll be thar wi' both feet an' loaded fer b'ar!"

"You'll have to git your peepers open first," sneered Milligin. "You ar' a fine specimen of a delegate to send out on business, and then to come home in this fashion!"

"Thunder! what could ye expect? Thar was only us five 'gainst ther hull camp o' Rosy Posy!"

"Bah! didn't you hear what Den said?"

"What did he say?"

"He said one man done you up, an' a young fellow at that."

"Then he's a blame liar; that's all. Thar

was twenty onto me all to oncet, ef thar was one!"

"Well, have it your way," said the mayor. "But, that woman at the Bungalow is waiting to see you."

"That's so! Had fergot 'bout her. Guess I kin find ther ranch."

He could see just a little out of one eye, and making the best use of that he found his way to the hotel.

A woman was on the piazza, evidently awaiting his coming, and when he had mounted the steps she took a pinch of his sleeve and led him into the house, where she put him on a chair.

"Well?" she demanded.

"Et was her!" the man declared, positively.

"You will swear that this young woman who has come to Rosy Posy is the original of the photograph I showed you?"

"Sech is ther case, sure enough, an' I'll take oath to et on ther pootiest deck o' cards you ever sot eyes on in your life, Pistol Polly. She's ther gal you ar' gunnin' fer, no mistake."

CHAPTER VI.

PISTOL POLLY'S SCHEME.

AND who was this Pistol Polly?

She was a woman under twenty-five years of age, and not by any means devoid of good looks.

With her handsome face, however, she had a hard expression, which was natural to her, but which she could chase away in an instant when she chose to put on her usual smile.

Here, with this man Arnold, her face was in its natural pose and the hard expression was plainly discernible.

She appeared pleased at what she now heard.

"Well, as you are certain on that point, Abe Arnold," she said, "everything is all right. But, tell me, did you see her before you had the fight, or afterward?"

"I tumble to what you're drivin' at, Pistol Polly. I seen her 'fore the fight. If I hadn't, I guess I wouldn't seen her at all, if it's true what they all tell me."

"Well, it's true enough, and the more fool you for getting into a fight. How do you expect to carry out the rest of the work I have got for you to do, now?"

"Hadn't any idea of gettin' into a fight. I mistook a young fellow fer a milk-an'-water kid, and threw a chunk o' sod at him an' took him in ther neck."

"And then you found he was more'n you could handle, eh?"

"Do I look as if I handled him?"

"You look as if you had been run through a thrashin' machine, that is how you look."

"Wal, he was the thrashin' masheen that done et, an' nobody else, though I wouldn't 'mit et to the crowd. But, you kin bet I'll git even with him fer et 'fore he gits out of this hyer gulch."

"And did I understand Den Hiker to say that this young fellow seems to be a partner of this Lucy Love?"

"That's about ther size of et, Pistol Polly."

"What's his name?"

"Heard 'em call him Bristol."

"Then there will be two for you to tackle, instead of one."

"Ther feller and the gal both, hey?"

"Exactly. But, I'm half afraid to trust you, now. You are out of trim for important business."

"Think so? Well, I ain't then. I'll have my other peeper open by the time ther sun goes down, an' then let that galoot at Rosy Posy look well to his health!"

"I hope you will be all right, then. As I have taken you into this thing I don't want any one else to have a finger in the pie. I have reason to believe that I can trust you,

and if you serve me I'm going to pay you well."

"Five hundred, you said."

"That's the figure, five hundred dollars; and I'll make it a hundred more if you can put this fellow Bristol out of the way."

"Then that hundred will be a clear an' clean present, fer I'm goin' ter do that job anyhow, you bet! He has riled up ther tiger that's in me, an' nothin' but his blood will make ther beast down."

The woman broke suddenly into a peal of laughter.

"What's broke loose now?" the whiskered tough demanded, with a voice something like the subdued roar of a lion.

"I was only comparing your assertion with your appearance, that's all. You said he had roused the tiger in you, while it looks to me as if the tiger was turned into a scarecrow. Ha! ha! ha!"

The fellow's hideous face grew more forbidding still, as he tried to frown.

"Don't you go ter make no fun o' me, Pistol Polly," he warned.

"Bless you, Abe, that's not making fun! You simply don't know how comical you look. But, now to business."

"Well, what is ther business?"

"You will be on hand at the opening of the dancing-school in Rosy Posy?"

"That's what I'm goin' fer, you bet. And ef that smart Alex gits in my way he is goin' to hear somethin' drop—"

"Just what I'm afraid of. You will get into trouble with him and he will do you up for fair, and then where will your five hundred be? I want you to attend to business first."

"Wull, ain't that business?"

"It may be the business that will finish you if you don't go slow about it, that's so."

"Then how d'ye want et done?"

"Couldn't there be a mystery there at Rosy Posy, don't you think?"

"What kind of a mystery?"

"A murder mystery," in whisper.

"Thar might be, I s'pose."

"If this girl should be found dead in the morning, couldn't it be made to appear that this fellow Bristol had done the deed?"

"Mebby."

"And how much money would it be worth, do you think?"

"A cool thousand, in clean cash, and not a penny less. Not that I'm sayin' I'd do et, mind ye."

"And not saying that I'm offering any such reward for the service. You are not a fool, Abe, nor am I. I have got just a thousand dollars laid by, however. You understand?"

"Reckon I do. If I kin git these hyer eyes open, I'm your domino."

"Then there is nothing more to be said. See that you keep sober, and that you say nothing to anyone. I am putting a big trust in you, Abe Arnold."

The woman had risen, and now showed the tough out of the room.

Her face took on a dark look immediately, as he disappeared.

"If he will only serve me," she said to herself. "My interests here are too great for me to throw them up, and yet it will spcil all if Lucy Love comes here—as she certainly will if she learns that I am here. But, curse her, she shall be removed from my path!"

In the mean time Mayor Milligin had been waiting for Arnold to come forth.

"Well, what have you got to report?" he demanded. "What apology did Marshal Mackerel make? What did he say about taking advantage of us the way he has been doin'? That's what I want to know. If you was fool enough to git licked, that was your fault."

"Et was, hey? Wull, he said as how if you wanted a dose of ther same medicine you knowed where to find ther doctor, an' that I could tell you so with his compliments

or words to that effect. That is ter say, he perlutely tells you to go to blazes, and that he'll do as he pleases!"

"An' that was the word he sent, was et, curse him? He feels his oats sence they have stuck up that shanty they call a Town Hall. But, we'll make him take water before he is a day older, an' don't you forget et!"

CHAPTER VII.

SOMETHING OF A COUNTERPLOT.

A CLOUD was appearing on the horizon, as yet no larger than a man's hand but of decidedly sable hue.

Where the cloud would burst and what the damage would be, remained to be seen.

Mention has been made of the leading saloon at Rosy Posy, the Prohibitionist Headquarters, and it is to that resort that attention is now invited—and a pretty hard place it was.

A curious name for a saloon, and the more so for a mining-camp saloon, admitted; but it was only a name, after all, though there was a good deal of it. In fact, the front of the saloon had not been able to contain it all. The painter who had done the lettering had missed his calculation.

The name began all right, and ran along all right for several letters, and the point could be seen where the artist had first discovered that he was going to be cramped for room, for the next letter was just a trifle smaller than the first three or four. And the next was smaller still, and closer to the rest, and so it ran until the end of the line was reached.

There the letters stood as close together as it had been possible to place them, and they were very thin at that, but even that last measure had not saved them from slopping over, and in order to read the whole sign the curious one had to step around the corner and view it from the side. But, that was only a matter of passing moment and did not amount to anything. Enough of the name stood in front to enable any one to guess the rest of it.

The entrance was on a level with the street, by a door that would have done better service as the door of a barn, and the bar was the most conspicuous object in sight, at first blush.

It was a structure of rough planks well spiked upon a strong framework, and behind it were some shelves of similar planks stoutly braced.

On these shelves were bottles of many sizes and kinds.

Upon the boarding of the shanty itself, over the mentioned shelves, the name of the saloon was repeated in smaller letters—the artist had evidently painted this after doing the job outside, and had measured his space.

And then, under this sign, and in brackets, were the words:

(WHAT'S PROHIBITED? WATER!)

The proprietor of the den considered this a huge joke, and on one or two occasions when temperance advocates had wandered into the place, deluded by the sign without, he had enjoyed the joke to the full.

Further back, beyond a space that was left bare for dancing, were some tables and chairs, and at one of these tables were two men in whom we have interest.

One we have seen before, Barth Dimund. The other was a man who had come by the stage, as an outside passenger, and who had not registered at the hotel.

He was a man of ragged hair and unkempt beard, but who had a pair of keen and flashing eyes that did not agree with either hair or beard in color, for they were of the blackest.

His hair and beard were of a rusty color. He was roughly clad, carried a revolver

in a swinging holster at his hip, and might have been taken for a rough cowboy from a pretty tough section of country.

A close observer, however, would have noted that his hands gave the lie to this impression, for, though dirty enough, they were soft and evidently unused to hard knocks and rough usage.

"And that is the way you expect to find her, eh?" Barth Dimund was just just saying.

"That's the way. The little gal will run her down, sooner or later, and then I'll step right into the fortune and bag the game. See?"

"Yes, I see, and I see also a snag in your way, too."

"A snag? What's that?"

"This man who calls himself Dick Bristol."

"I have been thinkin' about him, and I have got his goose over to cook all right."

"You may be all right if you have, but you have seen what that fellow is made of, and you will do well not to run up against him, that's all I have to say."

"Not the first time I have seen him show his muscle."

"What do you mean?"

Thereupon the stranger related a circumstance that had occurred at the last relay station, where a big bully of a fellow had offered insult to Lucy Love and Dick had taken it up for her.

"And then what is your intention with regard to this young lady?" asked Dimund.

"I'll marry her, of course, if she'll have it so."

"Ha! ha! Well, that's a cool proposition, I must say."

"What's the matter with it?"

"A good deal—with you. Do you think for a moment she'd wed you?"

"She won't get a dip at the fortune any other way, that's certain."

"According to the story you have told me, she will come in for it all, soon as she gets the papers from this other woman, when she discovers her."

"Yes, soon as she does—which she never will by the way. I tried to find her, but failed, and then I took up the task of following this other, for it takes a woman to follow a woman, every time."

"You mean you think she'll never find her?"

"No, no; that she'll never get the papers! She'll find the woman all right, but I'll step in and take the papers, and she will have to dance to my tune or not at all."

"And what about the other party?"

"She'll not be in it at all. I'll pay her off for her treachery to me in the past, you bet!"

"There's one thing strikes me as peculiar in all this."

"And what's that?"

"That you should make a practice of going about and telling your private affairs to strangers—for instance, me."

"That's where you make the grandest mistake of your life, old boss."

"But, you have told me."

"Yet, I don't make a practice of doing it. You are the exception, and I have told you because I know you and because I want your help."

Barth Dimund gave a start.

"You know me?" he gasped.

"I rather think I do, my friend."

"Then you have greatly the advantage of me, that's all. My name is Barth Dimund, as I have told you, and yours, you said, is Joel Hicks?"

"Joel Hicks, that's what I said, and that name fits me as well as Barth Dimund fits you, if not a good deal better. There is a sort of give-away tone about the name you have chosen."

Both were speaking in low, earnest tones, and now Dimund leaned over the table, his face decidedly pale.

"Look here," he demanded, "I want you to speak right out plain."

"That's what I'm trying to do."

"You accuse me of wearing a false name."

"Your real name is Henry Snow—"

"Sh!" with a glance around, and with a face like death. "Don't mention that again, if you value your life! But, who in wonder are you?"

"Joel Hicks."

Dimund dashed his fist down upon the table with force, and ripped out an anathema, as if he cared not who heard, but his words that followed were as low-spoken as ever, or more so.

"You have got an unfair advantage of me," he complained. "If you want my aid you have got to show your hand and meet me on the level."

"And I am going to hold it, too—the advantage, I mean. I want your aid, and you have got to give it—do you nail fast to that fact? I want your help, and you have got to lend it."

"And if I refuse?"

"The worse for you, that's all."

"Well, curse the luck, you have got me, that's sure."

"On the other hand, aid me to establish my claim, and I'll divvy with you."

"To what amount?"

"Say a quarter."

"Done. Give me your hand on it, whoever you are, and it's a bargain. But, I fail to see how I can aid you, unless you have a scheme laid out."

"Well, I heard you remark that you had seen somebody whom this Lucy Love looks like. Have you thought who it is yet? There may be a clue in that to enable us to get in ahead of her all in good shape, after all."

"You have it, by Harry! The one I had in mind was a girl called Pistol Polly, who hangs out at Nuggetville. I'll bet she's the one you are on track of."

CHAPTER VIII.

TRYING TO PLAY A DOUBLE HAND.

THIS man who called himself Joel Hicks gave a start of surprise and uttered an ejaculation of delight.

He brought his dirty fist down upon the table with a thump, and voiced his satisfaction, after which he leaned forward to say:

"If she's the one, Hen Snow, the game is nearer than I thought it was, and we are sure of it. All I want is a little help from you, and I'll pay you for it, you can depend."

"Well, you take care not to call me by that name again, or you will hear somethin' drop; d'ye hear?"

"All right, Dimund; I'll take care."

"See that you do. And now, how much will there be in this thing for me?"

"How does five thousand cold stones strike you?"

"I'll go to the devil for that amount!"

"Then to the devil you will go, for that's the price, if you do the job and do it up brown for me."

"And what's the job?"

"To put this Pistol Polly out of the way," cautiously whispered.

"The deuce!"

"That was what I said. She has got to go, or I won't be in it. You don't know what a devil she is, when she wants to be."

"You talk as if you do know something about her."

"And I do. But, this is not to the point. Will you undertake to do the job for me?"

"Yes, for that price."

"Then it's a bargain. You know this Pistol Polly?"

"Certainly."

"And you can arrange it so that I can get a look at her?"

"That will be easy; I'll go over and

bring her here to the dancin'-school to-night."

"No, the deuce! That won't do!"

"Why?"

"That would bring the two gals together, don't you see, and they might do each other up."

"But, Polly could come disguised."

"And then what good would seeing her do me?"

"You are right. Well, what do you suggest then? You seem to have a head for planning."

"Let's both go over there to Nuggetville, and you get me a chance to have a good look at her face and I'll mighty soon decide whether she's the critter or not."

"Done. Come along."

They rose and left the room, and half an hour later found them in Nuggetville and at the Bungalow Hotel.

Joel Hicks went ahead and entered the bar-room, and Barth Dimund coming on a little later, applied at the main door of the shebang and made inquiry for Pistol Polly.

She was there and soon made her appearance.

"Good-evening, Mr. Dimund!" she greeted.

"Same to you," was the easy response.

"Any objection to sittin' down here on the piazza for a chat? I've come over a-purpose to see you."

"Not the slightest objection. Rather chat with you than with a good many men I know, Barth Dimund. But, how is it you can tear yourself away from Rosy Posy this evening?"

"Why?"

"Isn't the Town Hall to be opened, with a young lady to give dancing lessons? Seems to me it will be a red letter night in your camp's history."

"Yes, maybe it will, but, business before pleasure, you know."

"Then you have come to see me on business?"

"I have."

"And what is it?"

"You have not forgotten our former talk?"

"No; but, surely you have gotten over that foolish idea, haven't you?"

"That I love you?" in low tone. "Not a bit of it. I want to know again if you will marry me."

"What's the use? I'm free, and I mean to remain so. I like you, and I'm willing to let you love me all you want to, but I don't propose to give any man a monopoly of my regard."

"You did so once."

The woman gave a start.

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

"Just what I say. Are you free to marry if you would?"

She paled a little, but her answer was quick.

"Yes, I'm free. No man has any claim on me—or if he has I'd like to see him try to foreclose, that's all."

"Well, now, see here, Pistol Polly: I'm either for you or against you, and I had rather be on your side. There is trouble hatching for you, and I can be of use to you, if you'll let me."

"I'll let you, certainly, but what are you talking about?"

"You'll let me, no doubt; you would willingly take my services, for nothing; but, I am not going to have it that way."

"I fail to hold fast, Barth."

"Then I'll try to give you a better grip, so you can. There is a fortune at stake, and you want it."

She gave another start.

"And, I want a slice of it myself," the man immediately added. "As it stands naturally, you come in for only a small share of it. I can make it possible for you to get the whole."

She was now pale to the lips, and looked at Dimund wonderingly.

"You see I know what I am talking about, Pistol Polly," that worthy boasted. "Now it is for you to say whether I shall be for you or against you."

"What are your terms?"

"Marry me, and give me a half share with yourself, and I'll see to it that you get every dollar of the fortune."

"And if I won't do that?"

"Then I'm on the other side, and shall have to work against you, for a consideration."

Pistol Polly's face settled into a hard, grim expression, and with her lips drawn in a firm line, she said:

"Then you want to force me to terms to suit you."

"I want to give you the chance to accept my regard and be my wife. I care not what your past is."

"And if I'm not free?"

"By Judas, I won't hesitate about making you so!"

"I wouldn't object to your doing that for me, but I'm not in the matrimonial market."

"Then you refuse my offer, do you?"

"How much are you getting from the other side?"

"No matter; I will make no other terms with you than I have offered."

"And suppose I deny the whole matter, and tell you that you are on the wrong trail, what then?"

"It won't work. I have got the facts too straight, my pretty Polly, for that. Whether you know it or not, that young woman at Rosy Posy is on the tall hunt for you, and she is likely to find you, too."

"Tell me, how came you by all this knowledge?"

"Sh!"

A man had come out of the bar-room and was sauntering toward them, a fellow with a tangle of hair and bushy whiskers.

He came on, passed them, strode to the end of the piazza and back again, and disappeared, saying never a word and seemingly paying no attention to the couple seated there.

"Knows enough not to intrude where he isn't wanted, anyhow," growled Dimund. "Now, as you were saying, Pistol Polly?"

"I demand to know how you came to learn all this."

"That don't matter, so long as I do know it and you know that I know it."

"No, it matters not, for I am going to defy you. Go ahead and do your worst. I will share neither with you nor any one else!"

"You will have nothing to share, my pretty Polly."

"All right; so be it! One thing is certain, I don't care a fig for you, and I would not marry you anyhow, so that dog is dead. Now, what are you going to do about it, old man?"

"You'll find out to your sorrow, curse you!" growled Dimund, rising and turning away. "I have made you a fair offer, Pistol Polly, and you have seen fit to make me your foe rather than accept it. You'll hear something drop before this thing is ended."

CHAPTER IX.

OPENING THE DANCING-SCHOOL.

THEY had spoken in low tones, Dimund for one reason and the woman for another, and they could not have been overheard.

Dimund left the piazza immediately and strode off up the gulch, while Pistol Polly looked after him with hatred, and her hand rested on a pistol.

"I've a notion to drop him," she grated. "I would, too, only that I might get into trouble, and that wouldn't pay, at this time. But, I'll get a chance at him pretty soon, no doubt."

Pistol Polly was a well-known character. She was not a lovable creature by any means, good-looking as she was.

And she was one to stand no fooling, as more than one man could testify, and as some others could not—owing to the fact that she had made them ready for “planting.”

She was not called Pistol Polly for nothing; she had the lives of at least three or four men to her account, and the rough characters of the gulch took care not to make themselves too familiar. Her pistol was ever too handy.

On this occasion she toyed with the weapon for a few moments, while she looked at the retreating form of the man who had just left her; then she removed her hand, with a sniff of disdain.

“Not worth the risk to do it,” she declared to herself. “But, he’ll get it, that’s sure. I’d give a good deal to know how he came by that knowledge. Can it be that—But, no; he hadn’t any more brain than the Lord allows the average man. And it isn’t likely that she would take such a fellow in as partner. There’s mystery back of it all.”

She paced the piazza for a few moments, then entered the house in a manner to suggest that a thought had struck her.

The next moment Joel Hicks came forth from the bar-room and hurried up the gulch.

When he reached the outskirts of the camp he fell in with Dimund.

The latter was waiting.

“Well, you got a good look at her, didn’t you?” Dimund asked at once. “You saw that I held her attention.”

“Yes, I got a good look—one half as good would have done the business just as well.”

“And she’s the gal?”

“She’s the one.”

“Then that much of it is settled.”

“But, you seem to be friendly with her; what’s between you two?”

“Ha! ha! That’s a fine question to ask. Of course we’re friendly, and she has more of the same kind.”

“Not a doubt of it,” sullenly. “I’m nothing to her any more, and it is a late day for me to kick. But, I’ll pay her off for the whole score. You don’t mean to back out, do you?”

“Not by a long sight!”

“Good enough! Then, we have only to work the scheme with care, and we’ll be all hunk for the rest of our lives.”

“That is to say, if the other one will marry you, which, in my opinion, is not at all likely. How are you going to plan it if she kicks over the traces?”

“Let her kick, if she wants to, once I get hold of the papers. I can prove my marriage to the other, and if both are out of the way, and I produce a kid to come in for the property—See?”

“You seem to know what you are talking about.”

“Bet your life I do!”

Rosy Posy was in an uproar and a blaze of light.

Torches burned here and there along the main street, and were numerous in front of the Town Hall.

That institution shone forth resplendent, from the numerous lamps within, and an eager crowd was at the door ready to pour in as soon as it was opened for their admission.

Said Big-foot Ben:

“I’m in a fever to git in thar an’ sashay around a leetle. Bet my boots that ’ar gal don’t have ter give me no lessons; I know et all a’ready!”

“In yer mind ye do,” some one sneered.

“And in these hyer feet o’ mine, too, you kin bet!”

“Ther goodness help ther lady, ef you ever step on her wi’ one o’ them things, Ben.”

“Don’t you worry ’bout my steppin’ on

her. Bet you a dollar she says I’m the best dancer in ther hull darn town, an’ take et up ef ye dare.”

“I’ll take that ’ar bet!”

“All right; hyer’s ther mon; cover et.”

And so they rattled on, from one thing to another, while they waited.

Finally the door opened, and the man whose name they had learned was Dick Bristol, appeared on the steps.

“Now, gentlemen,” he said, “we are ready to admit you, but we ask that you do not make a rush. Come in orderly, and remain on the outside of the roped circle you will see as soon as you step within. Now then, in you come, at a dollar a head.”

And at that rate they filed in, orderly enough, every man of them paying his dollar cheerfully.

The inside of the hall looked inviting. There were some seats, on the outside of the rope, and within the roped circle the floor was as clean and smooth as it could be desired.

One thing that some of the thinking ones looked for on entering, and which they failed to see, was where the music was coming from—not that it was expected yet, but they failed to discover any signs that it was on tap and ready for the eager and waiting pupils.

But the music was all right, and would be heard all in good season.

Lucy Love had not come to Rosy Posy entirely alone; a man of middle age, one of the outside passengers, was in her employ.

They had not been seen to speak to each other since the arrival of the stage, however, and of course this could not be guessed. And the unknown object which that man had carried under his arm, wrapped in a cloth, was a zither.

Finally, when the crowd had been admitted, Deadwood Dick placed another man at the door—a fellow recommended by Marshal Mackerel.

Dick then passed around and entered the rope circle, hat in hand, and a round of applause greeted him.

“Men of Rosy Posy,” he said, “you will now please come to order, and Miss Lucy Love will take charge of the hall and form her free class for this evening.”

“Three cheers fer Lucy Love!”

“Whoop ’em up!”

And they were given with a will.

“Lucy Darlin’!” some fellow piped up on the tail end of the last yaup.

“Thank you for your applause,” said Dick, “but please hear what I have to say and let me get out of the way. This evening, as said, the class will be free, but after to-night the lessons will be charged for. Private lessons can be arranged for at any time.”

“That’s what I want,” cried Big-foot Ben.

“An’ that’s what you’ll have to take,” declared another voice, “fer you will want the hull room to yourself when you dance!”

“Thought you was the best dancer in the camp, Ben,” reminded another.

“An’ how ’bout that dollar you have bet?”

“That’s all right,” the big fellow declared. “You wait till you see me on ther floor, then talk.”

Deadwood Dick smilingly waved them to silence again, and concluded what he had to say in the way of brief opening address.

“One thing more, and I’m done,” he said.

“Remember, men of Rosy Posy, that you are gentlemen, and that this is not a show. Lucy Love is a lady, trying to earn an honest living by this means, and as a lady I expect her to be treated. But, it is unnecessary for me to remind you of this, of course. Now, then, I will make way for the lady herself.”

With another bow and sweep of his semi-sombrero, Deadwood Dick hurried out of the inclosed space.

At the same time the young woman made

her appearance from a rear room, followed by the man we have mentioned.

He carried his zither, now not covered. A chair and a table had been placed for him at the rear corner of the rope inclosure, where the ends of the rope were secured to a post.

To his place the musician stepped, while the young lady, now tastefully attired, advanced to the middle of the space, where she made her bow.

This was the signal for another cheer, heartily given.

CHAPTER X.

BIG-FOOT BEN ON DECK.

ON leaving the dancing space, Deadwood Dick stepped immediately to where the mayor, Marshal Mackerel, was standing.

“Well, how is it?” he asked. “Do you see Nuggetville and Satan’s Pocket represented here yet? See anything that looks at all like trouble in the air?”

“Don’t spot a man of ’em, yet,” the mayor answered. “Everything is serene so far, and if they put in their appear I reckon we can handle ’em all right. We’ll make a big try fer et, anyhow.”

“Well, I hope there won’t be any trouble, but if there is I’m going to take a hand in it, if I’m called on to defend that lady.”

This last remark was made about the time the cheering ceased.

The young woman spoke.

“I thank you, kind friends,” she said, pleasingly. “And now I am ready to begin the business of the hour. You understand, you have to pay nothing for lessons this evening, but I must limit the class to twenty, for I cannot handle more of you at one time. You will now be treated to a little music by Mr. Brown.”

She waved her hand in the direction of the man at the table.

Immediately he struck the strings, and a delightful strain sprang forth, filling the large hall with sweetest music.

The crowd for the most part was made up of the roughs and toughs of the mining-camp, but under the spell of such music they forgot themselves and for the once were as quiet as lambs.

When the player ceased, a sigh was heard.

“Darn me ef that wasn’t somethin’ scrumptious!” one fellow was heard to exclaim.

“You kin bet your life et was!” cried Big foot Ben. “Had jest all I could do ter keep my feet still, they wanted ter waltz thet bad!”

“You homely galoot, that wasn’t no waltz, but a polka!”

“No matter; they wanted to git thar jest ther same.”

The young woman waved silence.

“Now, gentlemen, who will form my first class?” she asked. “Mind, do not all speak at once, and bear in mind that I will allow no fighting for place. The first man to make trouble will have to apologize to me.”

“Count on me fer one,” cried Big-foot Ben, leaping out into the space with a force that made the floor tremble under his weight.

“Yas, an’ hyer’s me, too,” yelled another.

The start having been made, the applicants came faster than they could be numbered, and in less than a quarter of a minute the limit had been exceeded by a dozen at least.

“Stop!” the little lady cried. “Stop!”

The stampede was checked, as she held up both hands to enforce her order, and order was restored.

“Now, gentlemen, form in line,” she directed, “and I will count off twenty of you, beginning on the right, and the rest will have to wait till next class.”

“All right, lady; that takes me in, anyhow,” said Big-foot, satisfied to have it so, seeing that he was in the right wing of the line of applicants for instruction in the Terpsichorean pastime.

The others made no objection, and it was found that the number of applicants had exceeded twenty by just thirteen.

"I thort et was a darn big score," declared one of the thirteen, "but I wasn't goin' ter be the one to kick 'bout et. Ef she had counted from this end, we would have been in et, sure."

"But, seein' that she commenced on the right, you got left," cried Big-foot, jestingly. "An' then thirteen is a onlucky number, anyhow."

"Et seems ter be, this time."

They were like a lot of overgrown boys, all of them, and they had to have a little fun in their own way as they went along.

All wore rough stogies, had their hats on, and all were armed, having revolvers either in their belts or dangling in holsters at their hips, and their appearance as a whole was not prepossessing.

"Now, are you ready?" asked the teacher.

"You bet!" cried Big-foot.

"Hold on, though, before we begin; can any of you dance at all?"

"I'm ther chicken what kin, you bet!" Big-foot Ben declared quickly and positively enough.

"And can any others?"

"Et's accordin'," muttered one Tough-jaw Terril, so-called.

"According to what, sir?"

"To what kind o' dance ye mean, ma'm."

"True enough. I am speaking now of the waltz. Can you waltz, sir?" to Ben of the big-foot distinction.

"That's jest whar I git in my finest work at dancin', you bet," Benjamin declared boastfully. "Ef you doubt my word, jest set up ther moosic an' see me go pivitin' around hyer oncet."

"I will see what you can do. Mr. Brown, a waltz, please."

The musician struck up a tune, and Big-foot Ben began to swing himself as if to get into perfect rhythm with the strain before he cut loose from his moorings.

"Let'er go, Benjamin!" some one sung out.

"What yer waitin' fer, like that?"

"Keep still," another. "Don't yer see he's strainin' to start his feet? You let Ben alone; he's all right."

"Bet yer life he's all right," averred Big-foot himself. "Keep yer optics onto me, ef ye don't believe et. Now I'm off, an' away we goes; tra, la, la—tra, la, la—tra, la, la."

And thus sirging, in time with the strain, he launched out and began to waltz—in his own peculiar fashion.

He could dance—oh! yes, he could dance; but such dancing!

Only a step or two had he taken when the teacher began to smile, and before he had made half the circle of the floor she was laughing.

And not only she, but all who were looking on at the performance, for Big-foot Ben had all the native grace of a cow, at dancing, to say nothing about a good deal of the stiffness of a man with wooden legs.

"That will do, sir, that will do!" Lucy Love cried out.

"How was that 'ar?" cried Big-foot, ending with a final flourish. "Wasn't thet 'ar jest superb?"

"Wull, et was that," cried one of the onlookers. "Never seen nothin' like et before in my life, old man; you take ther palm fer dancin' every time, you do!"

"An' whar's thet dollar I hev won?"

"You hol' on till we have heard ther lady say jest how much you know 'bout et, Benjamin!" demanded the man with whom he had laid the wager.

"What do you say, gal?" cried Ben.

"You are a wonderful dancer, sir," was the acknowledgment. "You certainly have a peculiar step of your own that is positively inimitable sir."

"What did I tell yer?" bellowed Ben,

boastfully. "Don't reckon you kin l'arn me anything 'bout dancin', kin ye, ma'm?" to the young lady.

"I hardly think I can, sir. I had rather teach those who are beginners."

"That's what I thort. Trot out that 'ar dollar, old pard!"

And Big-foot Ben proudly left the dancing-floor and went in quest of the dollar he certainly felt justified in claiming.

The teacher then gave her whole attention to her class, and for half an hour the room was kept in a constant uproar of laughter occasioned by the awkward efforts of the roughs and toughs at dancing.

"There, gentlemen, that will do very well for your first lesson," said the young lady, finally. "You have done well enough. You may retire, and I am ready for another class."

Just at that moment there was a commotion at the door.

"Hold on," the door-tender was heard to cry out: "you have to pay to get in here, boys!"

"Ther thunderashun we does! We'll see 'bout that, we reckons! Didn't ther bills you sent up ter Satan's Pocket proclaim that dancin' lessons was free this evenin'?"

Deadwood Dick moved in the direction of the door, and likewise Marshal Mackerel.

"Yes, that's straight," responded the man at the door; "you won't be charged anything ter go on the floor to-night, but you have to pay to get in to see the fun, and don't you try to get in without payin', either!"

"What say, pards?" the man from Satan's Pocket demanded. "Ar' we goin' to ante this hyer deal, or pass?"

"I think you'll ante—before you pass this door," spoke up Deadwood Dick, at that moment showing himself with a pair of fivers to the fore. "The admission is one dollar, boys, and we have no free list to-night."

CHAPTER XI.

THE HOT FIGHT IN THE HALL.

The fellow gave one glance at Dick, and that was enough.

Dick's steady hand, and his flashing eyes, backing up the brace of guns, won the point in his favor.

"Pard, you holds a royal flush, you does," the fellow meekly declared. "I kalkylate et will have to be as you say. Pards, we'll have to ante, I reckon, ef we hope ter git in."

"I'm glad you see it in the right light," said Dick.

"Et's the only light we've got, pardner," the fellow rejoined.

"And you and your crowd are from Satan's Pocket?"

"That's straight, boss."

"Well, you are a pretty decent-looking lot of men, I will confess. I have seen worse faces in a Penitentiary, many a time. You are welcome to Rosy Posy—as I will take the liberty of saying for our mayor here, and all we ask of you is that you observe order."

"Yas, but darn me ef I have I have got a dollar to ante," declared the spokesman of the crowd, who had been fumbling through his pockets. "I wanted ter see this hyer show durn bad, too."

"You say you are strapped?" asked Dick.

"Clean gone dead broke, boss, an' I swear I didn't know et."

"Well, here's a dollar I'll lend you. You have got an honest face on your head, and I'll trust you a dollar's worth on the expression of it."

Dick thrust his hand in his pocket and gave the man a dollar.

The fellow's face beamed.

"Pards," he cried, turning to his crowd, "this hyer is what I call darn white treat-

ment, et is! What galoot amongst ye dares to say et ain't?"

Not a man of them denied it, but one fellow shouted:

"Et's jest as white as snow, pardner, you bet!"

"That's what I say. Ef ary feller has got anything to say contrary, let him say et now or ferever afterward an' henceforward hold his peace, b'gosh!"

"That's what's ther matter."

"You hear?" cried the favored man, turning to Dick. "We ar' with ye, an' ef one of these hyer galoots what's come with me dares to kick up a row, he is got to answer to me, an' don't you ferget it. I'm Crow Bullinger, from Satan's Pocket!"

"Pleased to know you, Mr. Bullinger," said Dick, giving his hand. "Come in, now, you and your crowd, and we'll entertain you. The lady is waiting for this little interruption to be settled before she begins with her second class of the evening. A dollar a head, boys, please."

And so they filed in, good-naturedly, and mingled with the denizens of Rosy Posy in a very friendly manner.

"Bristol, you are a hoss," declared Marshal Mackerel, aside to Dick.

"I don't know how that is, mayor," was the answer. "I had an object in handling this affair as I did."

"And what was your object?"

"To win the friendly feelings of these men from Satan's Pocket."

"I knowed et, by scat! An' that's why I say you ar' a hoss! I see what yer game is, boy."

"I want to be prepared for Nuggetville, if they come here looking for fight. You see, we couldn't make a certain stand against Nuggetville and Satan's Pocket together, but with Satan's Pocket on our side we are all right."

"That's what's ther matter. You ar' a born diplomat—ef that's ther word I am after; by scat you ar'!"

"It was only a stroke of hoss sense, that's all."

"An' you are the hoss!"

Lucy Love was again forming her class, now, and ere long she had twenty more raw recruits in the roped ring for their lesson in dancing.

It was rare pleasure to the rough fellows, to have this dainty little woman take hold of them and pull them into line, showing them how to place their feet, and it was rich fun for the audience to watch them.

There was a constant rattle of pleasant jesting, when the music was still so that it could be indulged in, but while the enchanting notes of the zither were sounding the crowd was for the most part still, save when an outburst of laughter ran through the room.

It was about the rarest treat this town of Rosy Posy had ever enjoyed.

And so it continued for another hour, without interruption, and it began to look as if Nuggetville would not come to mar the happiness of the occasion.

However, they reckoned without their host—that is to say, without counting Nuggetville in it, those who entertained this pleasant delusion; but Deadwood Dick and Marshal Mackerel were not of the number.

The doorkeeper had grown a little lax in his duties, since no one had applied for admission during the past forty minutes or longer, and of a sudden the crowd was startled by hearing a loud-mouthed yell in the direction of the door, and there stood Abe Arnold!

His face was swollen and discolored, and he was just able to see his surroundings clearly and no more.

"Whaucup!" he bellowed again, in the most terrifying tone he could bring up for the occasion. "Hyar I be, ther dancin' dicky-bird of ther woolly West, you bet!"

I am hyer with both feet, an' I have come ter stay! *Whauouaup!*"

Deadwood Dick was making in his direction with lengthy strides.

Likewise Marshal Mackerel, and some others, down the other side of the room, to nip his intention right in the bud.

"Come right erlong," the whacker invited, seeing them, and evidently not willing to submit to the nipping process as mentioned. "What I have said goes, an' you will have ther gol-darn'dest time of yer lives in puttin' me out! See these hyer guns? Wull, thar's five barks to each gun, an' a bite to every bark. Come an' see me ef ye want a taste!"

He had whipped out a brace of revolvers as he spoke, and held the crowd covered.

"Darn me, but et's a blasted galoot from Nuggetville!" cried out Crow Bullinger.

"An' thar's a heap more of us, too!" bel-lowed the hideous-faced Arnold.

As if this was the signal into the room poured a great crowd of the citizens of Nuggetville, all armed to the teeth and with weapons drawn.

Even Deadwood Dick and Marshal Mackerel hesitated.

"Ha! ha! ha!" roared Abe Arnold. "How do ye like ther looks of et, ye measly critters? Don't et look as ef we have got ther bulge on ye? Wull, I sh'u'd reckon et do!"

"What do you want here?" demanded Deadwood Dick, sternly.

"What do we want hyer? We have come to move this hyer dancin' skule over to Nuggetville, thar's our business hyer!"

"It is, eh?"

"You bet! Look'e hyer, gal, you pack up yer duds double-quick an' come 'long with us; d'ye hear?"

This to Lucy Love who stood trembling before her class within the roped inclosure.

She looked in a frightened, appealing manner, at Deadwood Dick.

"If you want her, you will have to take her," cried Deadwood Dick hotly, and in the same instant there was a report from somewhere in his vicinity.

It was a snap shot from the hip, of course, and with a howl of pain the ugly Abe was seen to drop one of his guns and begin to dance in a manner that was not set forth on the programme.

Nor did Dick hesitate to follow the shot.

He had his brace of fivers in hand in less than a fraction of a second, and all within the same period of time they were speaking, too.

Each bullet took effect, and several of those in the front rank of the mob were howling and disarmed before they fairly knew what had happened. Then Dick leaped toward them, shouting:

"At them, boys; Rosy Posy to the front! We'll see whether they will come here and run our business for us or not! Give them what they have come for—fight and plenty of it!"

"That's ther talk!" supported Marshal Mackerel, himself opening fire and following Dick. "We'll make business fer the surgeon an' undertaker, you bet!"

It took but a moment for the surprise to pass, however, and the men from Nuggetville returned the fire.

Then the shooting was general in no time.

Deadwood Dick who had forced his way to the door, now turned to see what the prospect was and particularly to get sight of Lucy Love.

He knew she was in deadly peril, and meant to tell her to run from the room to the apartment in the rear, if she had not already done so, for it would be almost a miracle if she did not get struck.

Just as Dick looked a tragic event took place, and he saw the little lady clasp her hand to her breast, reel, and fall upon the supporting arm of Brown, the musician.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MYSTERY OF A SHOT.

NOR was that all Dick had seen.

He had seen whence came the shot that had done the mischief, and the hand that fired it.

Just as he turned there was a flash at one of the windows, and he saw plainly a woman's hand holding the revolver that had spoken!

Looking instantly—in fact he took it all in with the same glance and in the same moment, he saw Lucy Love fall as described, and with a bound he was out of the door to catch the murderess.

Just as he cleared the sill, however, a fist took him between the eyes with a force that made him stagger and almost brought him to his knees.

At the same moment a revolver flashed, and Dick felt the wind of a bullet as it almost struck his neck.

He did not wait for another shot, but fired even as he was falling—or staggering as if he must fall, rather, and the man who had tried to kill him came to the ground with a groan.

Dick quickly recovered and dashed around the side of the hall, but the woman at the window had disappeared.

"Curse the luck, she has escaped!" he grated.

There was no time to waste, and it would be useless for him to try to follow now, so back into the room he hastened.

The shots there were fewer, and the men from Nuggetville—such as were in condition for it, were making their escape as best they could through the doors and windows, no matter how, eager only to get away.

Dick fired no more shots, but sprang to see how badly Lucy Love was hurt.

Barely a minute had elapsed.

As he hurried through the room, a revolver was suddenly thrust in his face and he felt the flash as it was fired.

Only the promptest kind of a dodge had saved his life, and he sighted instantly the man who had fired the shot. He was a rough fellow, one of the five who had come over from Nuggetville that afternoon.

It was Den Hiker!

Dick took a bead on him as quick as a wink and pulled, and to kill, but his weapon only snapped, he having already emptied it.

Finding himself alive, to his surprise, the fellow gave a yell of terror and a leap, and a few bounds carried him through one of the windows and he made good his escape.

Dick noted that the fellow had lost a strip from one of the sleeves of his red shirt, from shoulder to wristband.

Hurrying forward, Dick caught up the insensible young woman from the floor, where the man Brown was kneeling over her, and ran with her into the rear room, calling to the man to follow.

The shutters to this rear room were closed, and there they were for the moment safe.

"Is she dead?" Dick asked.

"No, I think not; b it she's hurt bad."

Dick laid her on a table, and immediately proceeded to find out.

The bullet had struck her just under the left breast, and there her dress was stained with blood.

She was bleeding more from her left arm, however, and a close look at the first wound showed that the bones of her corset had turned the bullet aside and sent it into her arm.

Dick felt to see if the bone was broken.

It was not.

"A mighty close call and a mighty fortunate escape," he declared. "She is not badly hurt, but has fainted."

There was water at hand, and, while there was hooting and yelling and firing going on

without, he set about restoring the young lady to consciousness.

"It must have been a shot by accident, I should think," said the man Brown. "I can't believe it possible that any one of the men could be so bad as to shoot down so pretty a girl."

"It was a shot on purpose to kill," said Dick; "that I know!"

"You amaze me, sir. Who was the man—"

"It was no man that fired it, sir, but a woman, and—"

"A woman! Good heavens! Then it must have been— But, I forget what I am saying."

"Then please do me the favor to recollect what you were saying, and finish it, sir," Dick requested.

"It is a secret."

"No matter; so much the better."

"But, it belongs to this lady herself, sir."

"No matter; I must know it. I may be able to be of great service to her."

"I cannot tell you, however; she may do so, perhaps, when she comes to and is made aware of what has taken place."

"If some one is seeking her life, Mr. Brown, it is a serious matter."

"Could not well be more serious, I am aware."

"It might have been, only for the fact that this bullet was turned from its course."

With his knife Dick had ripped open the girl's sleeve, and had bound a rag around the bleeding wound, and now she began to come to.

"Where am I?" she asked wonderingly.

"You are all right," assured Dick, gently. "Do not excite yourself, Miss Love."

"Ah! I remember. There was a fight, and— Yes, that is it; I was struck by one of the bullets!"

"But, you are not hurt badly, and will be all right in an hour, save the little wound in your arm. Did you see who it was fired at you?"

"That fired at me? Was it not a stray bullet?"

"No, indeed!"

"Then I know nothing more about it. Who could have been so cruel as to try to kill me purposely? I never wronged a person in my life."

"The one who fired at you was a woman."

"A woman!"

"Yes."

"How do you know, sir?"

"I saw her do it."

The young lady glanced at Mr. Brown, her musician.

"Did you see her face?" she immediately asked.

"No, only her arm," said Dick. "I sprang to arrest her, but got knocked down by some fellow and she was gone before I could recover."

"Well, it is a mystery, and it proves that my life is in danger. Do you think the fight is over? I must get to my room at the hotel. Heavens! I am frightened to death!"

"You must take it coolly," said Dick.

"Yes, I guess the scrimmage is about over, for the firing has nearly ceased— Ha! there is the cheer of victory, and Rosy Posy has won the battle. We'll wait a few minutes before we venture out with you, however."

Dick looked out into the hall proper.

The big room was empty, or nearly so, the whole crowd being out upon the one street of the camp.

And there they were whooping it up in good style for the victory they had won, for, as Dick had guessed, Rosy Posy had come off more than conqueror in the fray, with thanks to Satan's Pocket for a helping hand. Nuggetville had got more than she had bargained for, in this instance.

They had come in good force, almost

enough to have "cleaned up" Rosy Posy, perhaps, but they had run against a snag.

Dick bade the girl and her companion await his return before venturing forth, and he set out to find Marshal Mackerel, who was not far away, whooping it up with his fellow-citizens.

"Have they gone?" asked Dick.

"They hev dusted, hide, hair an' feathers!" answered the mayor, joyously.

"Good for our boys, then, and a cheer for the lads from Satan's Pocket!" exclaimed Dick, and he himself cheered.

The others joined him, and a rousing cheer was given.

"And now," called out Dick, "I want a posse of you fellows to aid me in taking Lucy Love safely across to the hotel, for an attempt has been made to murder her, and it may be tried again."

At this the whole camp nearly went wild, and mad and vociferous were the declarations of what would be done if the would-be murderer happened to fall into their hands. If within hearing, it was not likely that the woman would try it again just then, and Dick's object was accomplished.

CHAPTER XIII.

DICK HEARS SOMETHING.

Dick, the mayor, and some others, went back to where the wounded girl was waiting.

They found her standing up, talking with her companion, and but little the worse for her experience, except the slight wound in her arm.

"I am all right again, except for my arm, gentlemen," she said, trying to smile, "and that will soon get well, no doubt. I will now go to my room in the hotel, and Mrs. Juchert will attend to it."

"An' we ar' hyer to see that ye git thar in safety," spoke up the mayor. "I don't mean ter have another shot take ye off."

"It is not likely to happen, sir, seeing that the trouble is over."

"Yas, but Bristol, hyer, said et was a 'tempt ter murder you, an' ef that's the case et maybe tried on again."

"He must be mistaken, sir," and the young lady turned an appealing look to Dick, as if to seal his lips. "I'm sure it must have been a stray bullet that struck me."

"Wull, mebbe so."

"For, who would want to murder me?"

"Et's a darn mean man that would try et on, by scat!"

They left the hall and made their way to the hotel, under a strong guard, and there the young lady was turned over to the care of the landlord's wife.

In the mean time the rest of the citizens were taking account of damages done in the scrimmage, and they found quite a number of men who had holes in their skin made by bullets.

Some of them were pretty hard hit, too, and one of the men of Rosy Posy was dead.

A few of the men of Satan's Pocket too, were wounded, and two of those from Nuggetville were ready for planting—as they say out there, one being the fellow Dick had killed in self-defense at the steps, and the other was Abe Arnold.

The latter, it was found, had been shot in the back, a circumstance not easily explained, unless some one had taken him on the fly when he was trying to get out of the room. And that hardly held good, for he had been one of the most stubborn fighters of them all.

"What d'ye make of et?" asked the mayor of Dick.

"I don't know," answered Dick. "It has been a shot at short range, you see."

Dick had taken a lamp from a bracket, and with it he examined the work of the death-shot more closely.

There was the mark of powder around the hole in the fellow's shirt, showing that the pistol had been held close when the trigger was pulled. It looked like a plain case of murder.

"Et was a wicked way ter shoot, in a fair, stand-up fight, by scat!" declared the mayor, savagely.

"Took him when he wasn't lookin'," put in another.

"Not much that he could see, anyhow, with eyes like his'n was," some one else offered.

"Well, he got it, anyhow," declared Dick. "And, I have a fancy to find the bullet that done the business for him. Is there a surgeon in town?"

"Every man is his own surgeon, when 'casion requires," said Mackerel.

"Suppose we see if we can get the pill?"

"I'm 'greeable."

So, they set about the unpleasant task immediately, but it was discovered that it was not much of a job to do.

The bullet had gone quite through the poor fellow's body, and was found lodged in his shirt in front, and it was but little the worse for the mischief it had done.

"It couldn't be in better condition for my purpose," said Dick. "It will be easy to fit it to the gun it came out of, and as it is not the usual size it may not be a hard matter to find that gun."

"You talk like a detective, by scat!"

"Well, I suppose detectives draw their deductions by applying the rules of common sense, don't they?"

"So I kalkylate they do."

Dick put the bullet away in his pocket for future reference, and returned to the hotel, while the citizens set about cleaning up the gore and "planting" the dead men.

There is a natural callousness regarding such matters in your wild mining-camp, and to be true to our subject we have to imitate it.

When Dick entered the hotel he was told that Mrs. Juchert desired to see him.

He had no trouble in finding her.

"What is it?" he asked.

"The young lady wants to see you, sir."

"And where is she?"

"In her room. I have made her arm comfortable, and the other wound does not amount to anything. Mr. Brown is with her."

"All right, show me up."

So, Dick was conducted to the room and ushered in.

He found the young lady seated in a chair, and Brown occupied another at a little distance from her.

There was only one other chair in the room, and that had been set for the expected visitor, and Dick helped himself to it as soon as he had been greeted and made welcome.

"You sent for me?" he asked.

"Yes; I want to learn more about the person who tried to kill me."

"Has Mr. Brown here told you what I told him about it?"

"Yes."

"Then there is nothing more that I can tell, Miss Love. I did not get sight of the woman's face at all."

"And you are sure it was a woman?"

"The arm was cased in a woman's sleeve anyhow, and—but, yes, there is no doubt on that score."

"And she fired the shot that struck me?"

"Positively."

"Well, Mr. Bristol, do you think it would be possible for you to play detective sufficiently to learn who that woman was?"

"I think so. But, it is more important that I should play the detective to keep her from trying it again and finishing you off next time. She will probably try to make a sure thing of it."

"You can do that, too."

"Yes, but in order to do it I must know

something about you and your secret. This woman is your foe, and you suspect who she is."

She glanced at Brown.

"How do you come to know this?" she asked.

"By what your friend here let fall, though that was not much."

"You said you had revealed nothing, Brown."

"Nor has he, purposely," assured Dick. "He dropped a word and I guessed the rest. You are looking for a woman, and that woman is your foe. She is after your life, as we now have proof, and you had better tell me what you can so that I can be on the lookout for her."

"No, it cannot be possible that she is my foe—I mean the one I am in quest of."

"Then how do you explain her conduct?"

"It must have been some one else who shot at me."

"Barely possible, but why should a stranger shoot you?"

"Possibly mistaking me for another—don't you think so?"

"May have been so, but I doubt it. I think the one who shot at you knew you well enough, and had an object in putting you out of the way. But, I'll find out, no matter whether you tell me what you know or not."

"You are my friend, Mr. Bristol?"

"Firm as a rock. You must know that. You may trust me fully, no matter what your secret is."

"I hardly know, you are a stranger to me, and it is only because I have taken a liking to your face that I have trusted you thus far—"

"See here," said Dick, suddenly, "it is time you knew just who and what I am. Did you ever hear of Deadwood Dick, Jr.?"

"You are not he?"

"I am."

"Thank Heaven for sending you to me! Yes, I have heard of you, sir, and I have wished that I might fall in with you. Here is my hand; I will tell you everything about myself. Brown, am I not right?"

"I think you are," the man of middle age answered.

Thereupon to Deadwood Dick this girl told her story, to which Dick listened with close attention to the end, and when finally he left the room there was a determined expression on his face.

CHAPTER XIV.

TOO MUCH MYSTERY AROUND.

At an early hour on the following morning a man was looking for Barth Dimund.

This man was the stranger, Joel Hicks, and he seemed to be in a bad way about the business he had in hand. He seemed to want Dimund in the worst way.

But, no one had seen Dimund that morning—in fact, it could not be recalled that he had been seen on the previous evening, and where he could be no one could inform the anxious inquirer.

"I'll tell ye," said Big-foot Ben, suddenly thinking of something. "I haven't seen him sence you an' him went off in ther direction of Nuggetville together last evenin'."

Mr. Hicks seemed to give a start, and he looked uneasy, though there was no reason why he should, far as any one could see.

This took place in front of the Prohibitionist Headquarters, and while the group were still talking a man came running up the gulch out of breath, wildly waving his arms.

"What's ther matter with that ijjit?" muttered Marshal Mackerel.

"Mavbe he sees snakes," suggested Deadwood Dick.

"He acts like it, anyhow."

"By ther look of his face, I'd say he's had a sight of a ghost," declared Big-foot Ben.

"Wull, we'll soon know, anyhow."

The fellow came on, and he was recognized as a level-headed citizen who was not given to seeing either snakes or ghosts.

He was known as Peg McGrath.

"What's ther matter, Peg?" the mayor demanded as he came up.

"Murder!" the fellow panted.

"Murder?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"Barth Dimund, and he's—"

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Joel Hicks.

The others looked at him and found that he was pale to the lips.

"Tell us what you know about this, my man," said Deadwood Dick. "There is a good deal too much mystery around here."

"Yes, soon's I git my wind."

The fellow panted for a few minutes, while Joel Hicks rambled in an aimless way, wondering who could have done the deed, and so on.

"Now, I'll onwind," said McGrath, having got his breath under control again. "I was goin' down to Nuggetville, takin' ther left side of ther gulch so's to be in ther shade an' thar I kem onto his body."

"Shot?" asked the mayor.

"No, knifed. Ther body is thar in a clump o' bushes, with ther feet stickin' out jest enough to be seen, an' he's got somethin' red gripped in his hand—somethin' like a bit o' red rag."

"Let's go right down there," suggested Deadwood Dick.

"Come on," said Marshal Mackerel.

"An' you come too, seein' that you wanted ter find Barth Dimund so mighty bad," cried Big-foot Ben, speaking to Joel Hicks. "Mebbe you was the last galoot seen him alive."

The mayor and the others looked hard at this fellow, and he appeared ill at ease.

"What good'll it do to see him, if he's dead?" the man asked.

"What did you want to see him for, anyhow?" demanded Deadwood Dick.

"I had business with him."

"And what was that business?"

"I don't know as I need to tell you, sir."

"You may find it for the good of your health to tell somebody, before this matter is cleared up."

"Would you insinuate, sir, that I know anything about the death of this man?" and the stranger bristled up in a defiant manner.

"No, I say nothing of the kind, but I think the city marshal here will keep an eye upon you till we do know something more definite about it," was the rejoinder.

"That's what's ther matter," cried Big-foot Ben. "Mebby he ain't been runnin' round hyer all ther mornin' quirin' fer Barth Dimund fer nothin'. Mebbby he wanted to ward off s'picion in that manner, b'gosh!"

"You will go with us, sir," said the mayor, grimly.

And so they set out.

Peg McGrath led the way, and in due time they came to the spot where Dimund lay cold in death.

Deadwood Dick parted the bushes and looked in, and saw the body lying partly on one side, the right hand clutching tightly a piece of red cloth.

Entering, Dick pulled this from the dead man's grasp.

It proved to be a piece of red flannel, and with a satisfied ejaculation to himself the detective put it in his pocket.

"What hev' you found?" asked Marshal Mackerel.

"Maybe a clue," the answer.

"That bit of rag?"

"Yes."

"Men of Rosy Posy," cried Joel Hicks, fairly trembling, "I swear to you that I

didn't do this deed. If you have found a clue, sir," to Dick, "I beg of you run it to the end and prove me innocent."

"It remains to be seen whether you are innocent or not," was the grim answer.

"Shall I put him under arrest?" asked the mayor.

"I would, b'gosh!" cried Big-foot Ben. "Thar is s'picion enough hangin' to him, I think."

The mayor had asked Dick, but Dick was willing to let matters take their own course, and if the man was arrested there would be no harm done anyhow.

Dick did not believe him guilty of this crime, at any rate.

The clue pointed elsewhere.

It was found that the deed had been done with a bowie, and it was quite likely that the body had been thrown into the bushes afterward.

This theory was supported by the fact that the bushes were broken, while no marks of any trampling were to be seen on the ground where the body lay. And the knife, that was not discovered.

"What will you do with the body?" Dick asked.

"I'll send some men to carry it in," said the mayor.

"And I'll see to lockin' this cuss in ther calaboose," declared Big-foot Ben, with a tight grip on his prisoner.

Thus they returned to Rosy Posy, and the news having spread by this time, the street was thronged with an excited crowd eager to learn more about the mysterious matter.

At sight of a prisoner they set up a shout. "He is ther cuss what done et?" cried one man.

"Ef he is, he's our mutton!"

"I have a notion he is, boys," declared Big-foot, "but that ain't provin' et, of course. But, we'll see."

"Ef he did, et will be a bandy rope he'll be gettin', on me soul," cried an Irish denizen of the thriving camp. "We haven't had a daycint hangin' in a dog's age, begorra!"

"You'll lock him in the calaboose, that's what you'll do," ordered the mayor, "and keep him there till you hear further."

"Dhat settles it, begob."

"But, I swear to you that I am innocent," cried the prisoner. "Give me a fair chance to prove it, whatever you do."

"You'll have that, at any rate," assured Deadwood Dick.

"But, hello! what's this?" suddenly cried Big-foot.

All eyes were turned his way, the few that had not been before, and he was seen to jerk the bushy hair and beard from the man's head and face.

The prisoner stood forth a different-looking man entirely.

His hair was cropped close, and he had only a stubble of a few days' growth upon his face.

He looked pale, but now defiant, and his keen eyes glittered as he looked around at his captors. His face was grim, and he had the appearance of a convict who had done time.

"What does this mean?" roared Marshal Mackerel.

"Find out what it means," was the defiant snarl, the fellow's manner being now wholly changed.

"But, who an' what are you?"

"Find that out, too, dash you!"

"Lock him up, mayor, and have him guarded well," said Deadwood Dick. "I am going to Nuggetville, and may have news for you when I come back. The air is fairly thick with mystery around here, and a fellow can't draw a full breath."

CHAPTER XV.

PISTOL POLLY CORNERED.

TWENTY minutes later Deadwood Dick was on his way to Nuggetville.

He had a companion with him, a young fellow named Ned Wyler whom, he had picked out of the crowd and taken on the marshal's recommendation.

Ned was a dark-skinned fellow about Dick's own age, and Dick had noted that he had little to say but was ready to act whenever action was necessary, and made no fuss about it.

Dick wanted him to serve as guide.

What he wanted a guide for, the mayor could not see, for a blind man could not have missed the way to Nuggetville.

As one who knew the country for miles around, however, Ned Wyler could not be beat, and so he was the man Dick had picked out, as said, and whose selection the mayor had highly approved.

They went mounted, and Dick carried a lariat on the pommel of his saddle.

And as they rode out of Rosy Posy they looked like a pair of healthy, high-spirited cowboys of some wealthy ranch.

The guide had not thus far asked what was required of him. He had only declared that he knew the country well, and had the understanding that he was to be paid for his services.

"You are not much of a talker," said Dick as they rode along.

"No, unless I have somethin' to say," was the response. "Then I simply say it and close my trap again."

"That's not a bad plan, I declare. But that's not my nature, and I must let my jaw wag whenever I find any one to talk to. I suppose you know what is required of you?"

"I know that you have no need of me to guide you to Nuggetville."

"We are likely to have to go further."

"So I thought."

"The fact of the business is, we are going on a man-hunt."

"That don't surprise me, though of course I don't know nothin' about it yet. I know you mean business."

"So this fellow will find out, when I get hold of him."

"There's one question I would like to ask you."

"What's that?"

"Ain't you a reg'lar detective?"

"Maybe."

"And ain't you Deadwood Dick?"

"Well, now you are striking close to home. How did you guess it?"

"A pard I used to have knew you, and from what he has told me I was 'most sure it was you."

"Well, I'm the chap. But, how is it that you kept this to yourself? Most of fellows would have let it out, whether right or wrong."

"It was none of my business, and I thought when you got ready to let folks know, you would let it out yourself. If you didn't let it out, then it was likely that you had a reason for keepin' it to yourself."

"Well, say nothing about it yet awhile, anyhow."

They chatted on, Dick doing most of the talking, and in due time they arrived at Nuggetville.

Dick dismounted and entered the Bungalow Hotel, while his pard remained mounted and held his horse for him.

Dick asked to see Pistol Polly.

She had only just breakfasted, late as it was getting to be, and she gave Dick an audience in the apology for a parlor.

"You are the lady called Pistol Polly, I believe," said Dick.

"So I am called," rather stiffly.

Her eyes had a heavy look, and her face showed the signs of late hours and dissipation.

"And your true name is Mary Lovelaird."

The woman gave a great start, and her face paled. But, she was instantly on her guard.

"No, it is not," she denied. "What do

you mean by coming to me presuming to know what my name is? If I have another name besides the one I wear, that is no concern of yours, sir."

"Maybe not. No, your name is not Lovelaird, now, that is true, since you are a married woman. I should have said—Mrs. Frank Tremont."

She sprung from her chair.

"Leave this room!" she cried, pointing to the door.

"When I get ready," said Dick, coolly. "Sit down, for I am here on business and have something to say to you."

"You can have nothing to say to me, and I decline to listen to you. Unless you leave this room instantly, I shall do so. Do you understand what I am saying?"

"I am not deaf," answered Dick.

"I mean it!"

"You do not seem to be going very fast, if you do."

Dick's manner as well as his words served to enrage her, and she darted to the door.

To her amazement she found it locked!

"Open this door, sir!" she cried.

"I have not locked it," said Dick, quietly.

"But, you have caused it to be locked, and I demand that you open it!"

"I do not know the combination, Pistol Polly. If you will hear what I have to say, you may find it open when I am done—"

"I'll show you the combination, curse you! Will you open—"

"Not so fast, beauty," and Dick had her covered with a gun. "I have heard of your reputation with the pistol, and was looking for you to draw a popper on me. I have got there first, you see. Now, sit down."

There was that in Dick's tone and manner that obliged her to obey.

She had reached for a revolver, with a quick movement, but Dick had been far too quick for her, and she had not been able to carry her point.

"That's better," said Dick. "Now, let's talk."

She was sullen.

"Talk if you want to," she snapped. "You will have to do it, if any talking is done here."

"Well, that's what I have come for, and if you won't talk you will listen, for you can't well get out of doing that. Now, I have a proposition to make to you."

She neither spoke nor looked at him.

"There is a fortune at stake, a quarter of which is rightfully yours, if you will accept it. But, you want more. Now, the other party is willing to give you half, on condition that you return home—"

She looked at him now, eyes dilated.

"On condition that you return home," he continued, "give up this wild life, and try to redeem the past by living a straight life in the future. What do you say to it?"

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"You know well enough."

"And who is this other party you speak of?"

"Your sister."

Her face flushed and grew pale by turns.

"Then you know all? You know all about us, and you come from her?"

"Exactly."

Nervously she twisted her fingers, and it was plain that her mind was busy with a problem.

"Ha! ha! ha!" she suddenly laughed, harshly. "I am not to be caught with chaff, sir. She does not mean it, and it is only a trap laid for me. That is not the trouble at all."

"What trouble? What is not the trouble?"

"She cares nothing for me; she wants to get my share along with the rest, somehow."

"I swear to you, woman, that you wrong her. She means nothing of the kind. She is anxious only for your good, and I believe

truly that she would surrender all, if that would save you."

"Save me? What's the matter now? Didn't know that I needed any saving, for I claim to know where I'm at and what I'm doing all right."

"Trying to be funny will not alter the facts any."

"I know what the facts are."

"Then you are going to refuse the offer that is made?"

"Why does the hussy not come and make the offer herself? Who and what are you, that you act for her?"

"I am in her employ."

"I took you to be her lover."

"You see here, you shall not insult that lady in my hearing, woman! She is as far above you as the stars above earth!"

"How pretty!"

"But the reason she does not come in person, she does not care to risk her life, after the close call that was made for it last night— Ha! that causes you to pale to the lips, does it!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TRICKS OF A TRAIL.

THE woman's face had fairly blanched.

Whatever the reason, she evidently had good cause to fear Deadwood Dick, now, and showed it.

Dick waited for her to speak, but she did not do so, and when he had given her ample opportunity, watching her evident terror, he said:

"I am waiting for your decision, woman."

"And you have heard it. I will make no terms. Let the matter rest as it is, and I'm satisfied."

"But, it cannot rest even as it is unless you do your part. The quarter of the fortune had been left to you conditionally, and the condition is that you return home."

"Never!"

"Then you come in for none of it. You are foolish, very, for you are offered an equal share, and your sister longs to redeem and love you—in truth she does love you, or she would never have followed you the way she has."

"Pah! you let me take my own view of that, if you please."

"She is even willing to forgive and forget all that has taken place, even to the work of last night—"

"What do you know about last night?"

"Nothing, perhaps. Perhaps a good deal."

"Well if you know anything, prove it, that's all. And now I mean to leave this room if I have to break through a window to do so."

"That will not be necessary, for I think you will find the door open to your touch. But, before you go, one last chance— Do you refuse the offer that has been extended to you?"

"Yes," with an impolite adjective out of place. "I do."

"Just one question, then—can you tell me where I will be likely to find Mr. Den Hiker this morning?"

There was a startled look in her eyes—her face could not grow any paler than it was, and for a second she looked at Deadwood Dick in terror. The next moment she tried the door, flung it open, and was gone.

Dick smiled to himself, and passed from the room.

He entered the bar-room.

"I want to find Den Hiker," he said.

"Haven't seen him this mornin'," said the landlord. "Mebbe you'll find him down to the Blue Bottle."

This was a saloon that was to Nuggetville what the Prohibitionist Headquarters was to Rosy Posy—about the worst hole in the camp, and it was further down the street.

Dick left the Bungalow and went in that direction, motioning Ned Wyler to follow with the horses.

And as he went from the hotel, Dick took care, too, not to expose himself to a shot.

Where he could not help it, he looked back, with weapon ready.

He had no intention of trusting to the good intent of Pistol Polly to any extent. But, then, he had not left her unguarded, for the person who had locked her into the parlor with him was an aide.

Entering the saloon, Dick inquired again for Hiker.

He was not to be found.

No one had seen him that morning, so far as could be learned, and at the same time no one seemed to care where he was.

"Wasn't he one of ther galoots what ther crowd left at Rosy Posy last night?" asked one man.

"No, he got off safe there," answered Dick, "and he had business here before he struck out for pastures new. I have a ten-dollar bill in my pocket for any man who can put me on his track."

A frowsy-looking fellow rose up in the back part of the room, saying:

"I'm yer nugget, fer that price."

"You know where he is?"

"I know ther trail he took, an' whar he was headin' fer."

"That is all we want to know, if you are giving us straight goods for our money."

"An' that's what I am. Den had his pocket lined last night, an' do ye think he'd give me a rock of it? Nary. If I kin blow out on him I'm goin' to."

"It will be all to your advantage."

By the looks of the fellow, Dick would not have taken his word under oath, but if it was as he represented it, then he was probably to be believed.

At any rate, it was the only information that offered.

Dick called the fellow out, giving him a view of the promised reward as they left the saloon, and they stepped to where Ned was waiting.

"Now, then, let's hear about it," Dick demanded.

"All right, boss, an' I'll talk straight from ther shoulder fer that greenet you hold thar in yer hand."

"It's yours, if you do that."

"I'll do it, I swear. There's more'n a week's drunk in that tenner, an' that's what I'm achin' fer most."

"Well, go ahead, go ahead."

"I'm goin' now. You see, Den an' me cribbed together in our slab slap-up, an' when he kem in from Rosy Posy las' night he woke me up—not that he 'tended to, but he done et all ther same."

"Yes, yes."

"Well, I seen he was packin' up, and I asked him whar he was truckin' off to at that time o' night, an' he told me to go to hot. That sort o' riled me, an' I minded him that he owed me somethin', which he allowed that he allus would, an' then we had et."

"Come, come, cut it short."

"Wull, we quarreled, an' he packed up an' got out, an' I follered him, on ther sly. He went to the Bungalow, where a woman handed him somethin' at ther stoop, an' on he trudged, down ther gulch, till I ups behind an' poked ther cold nose of a gun under his off ear an' perlately asked him to hold up a bit. Lordy, I thought he'd die right thar!"

"Yes, yes, yes; but, that's not what we want."

"I'm done, now. That woman was Pistol Polly, an' I s'pected that she'd paid Den fer somethin'; an' she had, as he owned. But, he got over his scar', seein' et was only me, an' finally he got in a clip at me that laid me out, an' on he went. But, he had let out that he was trudgin' fer Placer Village, an' I

know that he took ther trail in that direction. What's more, he's got big nails in his stogies that makes a star on each heel!"

"Ha! that's worth the ten, of itself!" cried Dick. "You are a brick, my man, and if you'll go quietly to Rosy Posy and be there on my return, you may get another like it. Keep sober till you see me."

Dick paid the promised sum, and vaulted into the saddle.

"That's w'ot I'll do, you bet!" the bumper promised, and he waved his hand as Dick and Ned rode away.

"Well, we have got him, sure," declared Ned.

"You think so?"

"Sure of it, if he has headed for Placer Village. There's only two trails, and those boots of his will tell the tale."

"Yes, I think you are right; but, in point of time he has the start on us, and may have got there and gone further; or, he may have changed his mind. Still, cn we'll go."

"And we'll cross bridges as we come to them, not before."

"Good thought."

And on they pressed.

Near the camp the trail was much used, but ere they had gone a mile they discovered the boot-heels that had the stars on them.

They now pushed forward at a gallop, and made no stop till they came to a place where there was a forks, and there Ned examined well the ground to make no mistake.

"Not goin' to Placer at all," he announced. "That was a blind. He is stretchin' his legs fer Paradise. an' that's a good forty miles off."

"But, there's the star," said Dick, calling attention to it, in the trail that led in the direction on Placer Village.

"But, et ain't heavy enough," argued Ned. "An', et's left by the same boot every step, don't you see? And thar on ther side is the print of a bare foot—"

"By Heavens, you are right!"

"He's cute, is that cuss. He said Placer Village fer a blind, an' now he is tryin' to make it 'pear that we went that way fer sure enough. But, he didn't. Ha! he wants et to look's if he got on ther sod here, an' this is the last of the trail."

They looked in the other direction, and there they discovered the imprint of bare feet, here and there along the edge of the worn trail, and finally these tracks appeared in the center of the trail, making good strides for the place called Paradise. And, in less than a mile further, the star boot-heels were again discovered and they led straight on and on.

CHAPTER XVII.

BAGGING A BUZZARD.

FINALLY Ned Wyler drew rein.

Dick did likewise, and looked to his companion for explanation.

Bristol had not been doing the trailing to any extent, since he had the fullest confidence in Ned.

He had watched him closely for a time, and, satisfied that he knew his business thoroughly, especially after what he had seen at the place where the trail forked, had taken no further concern.

Dick had work to do with his brain, and allowed Ned to take care of their present task.

"What is it, Ned?" Dick asked.

"The trail stops. I think I understand 'it.'"

"What is it?"

"The fellow was up all night, and he has tuckered out and crawled into the bushes for a sleep."

"That's so, and we may find him there still; but, here comes some one down the

trail, and we had better see who that is, first, and attend to our man afterward. Make no noise."

They drew to the side of the trail, and waited.

The hoof-strokes of a horse were heard, and soon the animal came in sight around a bend.

To the surprise of the two men the beast was riderless, though it was saddled and bridled. It looked as if there had been trouble up the trail somewhere.

"What does this mean?" asked Dick.

"I give it up."

"We'll capture the beast, anyhow."

"That will be easy enough, if we don't give it a scare."

"Let the horse see us before it gets upon us, and it will naturally come to a stop for company."

They moved on down the trail at a walk, leaving room for the riderless animal to come between them. This the horse did, dropping to a walk as he did so, and Dick caught the rein.

"Do you know the horse?" asked Dick.

"Should say I did!" declared Ned. "It's Marshal Mackerel's!"

"The deuce it is! Then maybe something has happened to the marshal. I don't like the looks of this."

"I see no blood on the horse or saddle."

"Well, we'll find out when we get back, of course. Now for our man."

"Yes, if he is still here. I hope he hasn't taken it into his head to cut across country."

"That would give us trouble, sure enough."

"But, I hardly think it, for he is a lazy cuss. More than likely he is sound asleep in the bushes."

Looking close to find the spot where the fellow had turned from the trail, they were not long in making sure of it, and then followed it.

There was something of an open glade, just beyond the first line of bushes along the trail, with a few trees here and there, and in a few minutes Dick sighted his Dead-Sure Game.

There was Den Hiker, lying sound asleep beside a spring of water under the shade of a tree!

Nordid their approach awaken him.

The captured horse stepped immediately to the pool, and began to drink and Dick, dismounting, carefully put the noose of his lariat around the sleeping man's neck; but even this did not disturb him.

Dick remounted, and then he gave the lariat a sharp jerk.

This had the effect to bring the fellow back from the Land of Nod, and he opened his eyes in a wondering way.

"Get up there, and put up your paws!" cried Deadwood Dick loudly, at the same time pulling on the lariat.

The captured man was not slow to take in the situation then. He was on his feet in no time.

"Great Jimminnee!" he gasped, holding up his hands in the approved fashion. "I guess et's your say-so, pardner."

"Yes, I think it will be," assured Dick, grimly.

"But, what do this hyer mean?"

"It means that you are a prisoner."

"Yes, a blind man could see that; but, what am I a prisoner fer?"

"What were you running away for? You answer that question, and you will have the answer to yours."

"Wull, I didn't know as I was runnin' away. This hyer is ther first I have heard of et, if it's so. Didn't look much like et, when ye found me asleep hyer, did et?"

"This talk is idle. We have got you, Mr. Hiker, and that is the main point. Ned, take this lariat."

Dick's companion, riding forward, took

hold of the lariat, and Dick slipped out of the saddle.

"Put a hole in him if he tries any tricks," he ordered.

"You bet!" Ned assured.

Dick stepped up to the prisoner and disarmed him, and having done that, demanded.

"Hiker, how did you tear the sleeve of your shirt?"

There was a missing strip in one of the sleeves of the fellow's red shirt, all the way from shoulder to wristband.

"I don't know as that is any of your business," was the retort.

"No, I suppose not, but you ought to have it mended. I noticed it last night, when you tried to do me up, at the time of the little unpleasantness in the hall."

"Wull, what ef ye did?"

"Did you tear it before, or after, you last saw Barth Dimund?"

The fellow's face turned white, and his knees evinced a decided weakness in an instant.

"What yer mean?" he demanded.

"Just what I'm asking you! Did you tear your sleeve after your last interview with Dimund, or before?"

"I ain't had no interview wi' Dimund."

"All right; let us see how this strip of stuff will fit the place that is torn."

Dick took from his pocket the strip that had been taken from the hand of the murdered man, and held it against Den Hiker's arm.

It was the very piece that had been torn from his shirt!

"That is all the proof we want, sir," Dick declared. "This rope around your neck will serve to hang you with when we get you to Rosy Posy."

Down the ruffian dropped to his knees, and began to beg.

"Let me go! please let me go!" he pleaded. "I own that I did do up Dimund, but he was no good, anyhow, an' et was a fair fight—"

"Hold on right there!" ordered Dick. "Was it a fair fight with Abe Arnold, when you shot him in the back—"

"Who says I shot Abe Arnold? I didn't know he was dead!"

"I have not told you he is dead, have I?"

"No, but I take et that's what ye mean ter say."

"Well, that's a small point. Let's see what kind of a gun do you carry, anyhow—"

Ha! I thought so."

"You thought what?"

Dick took from his pocket the bullet that had taken the life of the man in question, and compared it with those in Hiker's revolver.

It matched them, and there could be little doubt where the bullet had come from.

"Nothing can save you, my fine fellow," he declared. "If you have got any prayer to say you had better say it."

"You don't mean to hang me hyer an' now!"

"Why not?"

"Fer ther love of goodness don't do et! I'll do anything ye want me to, ef ye will only spare my life!"

"Will you make a clean breast of this whole business?"

"Yes, yes, I swear I will!"

"Well, who hired you to kill Hiker and Arnold?"

"Et was Pistol Polly, that's who et was, an' nobody else."

"So I thought, and so I am not surprised. But, why did she want them killed? Can you tell me that?"

"No, I don't know that, fer certain, but I think I have got onto et, an' fer that reason I was lightin' out, ter save my own skin."

"Well?"

"Ye see, I take et she had hired them to do dirty work for her, an' to shut their

heads she hired me to kill 'em. Then, no doubt, she 'tended to drop me herself, an' that would do ther hull business, but I thought I had ruther drop out."

"I guess you have got it straight, Den Hiker."

CHAPTER XVIII.

PISTOL POLLY'S REFUSAL. ENDING.

If Den Hiker had hopes that this confession would free him, he hoped in vain, for it assuredly did not.

He was forced to mount the extra horse that had been supplied in so strange a manner, and the trio set out for Rosy Posy, but not by way of Nuggetville.

There was a way around, though it was a little further, and Deadwood Dick considered it best to avoid Nuggetville, not knowing but that the denizens there might try to rescue the prisoner.

In due time they reached their destination, and the prisoner was promptly put in the calaboose.

"Where's Marshal Mackerel?" asked Dick, forthwith.

"You orter know, seein' that you have his hoss," responded Big-foot Ben.

"We captured his horse, riderless, some miles the other side of Nuggetville," Dick explained.

"Then the mayor is in trouble, b'gosh!" the big fellow cried. "He set out fer Nuggetville, sayin' he wanted to overtake you ef he could."

"Then to Nuggetville we go!" cried Dick. "Get ready, a good posse of you, and I'll lead you."

"Hooray! An' ef harm has come to the mayor, woe unto ther people o' Nuggetville!"

"You bet your life on that, every time!" In ten minutes they were ready, a good number and all armed to the teeth, and with Deadwood Dick at their head they were off.

Nothing occurred on the way, and the denizens of Nuggetville were surprised to see them, as may be supposed.

It was thought they had come for fight, and there was a hasty closing up of shops and shanties, every man jack of them getting out his extra gun, if he had one. They believed they were going to be called to account for their work of the night before at Rosy Posy.

"Where's Bill Milligin?" demanded Deadwood Dick.

"He's hidin' under ther hotel piazzzy," some fellow disclosed.

"Then he had better come out here and show himself," cried Dick, laughing.

The mayor came forth, shamefaced enough, and asked what was wanted, mentioning something about looking for a stray cat.

This brought forth a yell of laughter from the men from Rosy Posy, and it was so hearty that it, in a measure, reassured the men of Nuggetville and they began to show themselves.

"What's wanted?" the mayor asked.

"We want to know if you have seen Marshal Mackerel," explained Dick.

"Not sence he went through hyer some hours ago, on his way to Placer, as he said he was goin'."

"Ha! that begins to explain it. Who was with him?"

"Nobody."

"And who followed after him?"

"Wull, nobody but Pistol Polly, and she ain't—"

"Ha! the risk was too great," muttered Deadwood Dick. "I fear she has done for poor Brown. Here, Ned," to Wyler, "hold my horse till I come back, or, if I call you, you and some others come after me."

He slipped out of the saddle and ran into the Bungalow.

"Show me to Pistol Polly's room, quick!" he demanded of the landlord. "Not a minute to spare."

"What's up—"

"No matter what's up! Do as I bid you," displaying a gun, "and we'll explain afterward."

The landlord obeyed now, in haste, and on entering the room there on the floor lay the insensible form of a man of middle age—Brown, the musician.

He it was who had come ahead of Dick that morning, and who had locked the door of the parlor upon Pistol Polly, as described. There was a cut on his head, showing where he had been dealt a terrific blow.

Dick felt for his heart.

It was beating, and throwing up a window he called for some of his men.

In a moment Ned Wyler, Peg McGrath, Big-foot Ben, and others, came bounding up the stairs.

"Do what you can for this man, boys," commanded Dick, hurriedly. "Bring him to and take him to Rosy Posy, and take the best of care of him. You and I, Ned, have got some more trailing to do."

Dick left the house and ran to his horse, Ned following, and there Dick made a division of his posse. He left half to attend to Brown and to see to other matters of which they had an understanding; the rest he took with him for the purpose of bringing in the mayor's body.

He certainly expected to find him dead.

"One of us ought to have come this way before," Dick said to Ned, "but, a man can't think of everything at once."

Half a mile out of Nuggetville they found Marshal Mackerel, but not dead. He had been struck on the head by a bullet, but only creased, and he was just coming to his senses when they found him.

Dick left the men to take care of him, save Ned Wyler and Peg McGrath, and with these he pressed on, determined to find Pistol Polly at any cost.

It was not until the following morning that Deadwood Dick and the others, with their prisoner, reached Rosy Posy.

Their prisoner was Pistol Polly, pale and worn-looking, but defiant and full of venom, and now she was showing all the evil of her nature.

When they rode into the camp, out from the hotel rushed Lucy Love.

"Mary, my sister!" she cried. "I have been looking for you, and I want to save you! Will you not accept the terms I have offered you by this gentleman, Mr. Deadwood Dick?"

"Deadwood Dick!" cried the crowd.

Dick inclined his head in acknowledgment.

The whoop that went up, then, was deafening, almost.

"Never!" the woman-prisoner cried defiantly, as soon as she could be heard. "Only for you, I would not be where I am to-day, and now you would have the people think you are a saint!"

"Mary, you wrong me—"

But, the other turned upon her with a string of abuse and profanity, and the girl was forced to run weeping into the hotel.

"You are not deserving of the mercy she would show you," cried Deadwood Dick, utterly hardened against her. "You lie when you accuse her of having had anything to do with your career."

"And you, curse you! I might have guessed it was Deadwood Dick!" turning on him in her fiercest manner. "No other man could have trapped me as you did, you—"

She had to be thrust into the lock-up to quiet her.

Lucy Love's true name was Lucy Love-

laird, and she and this other were sisters, Mary being the elder by several years. At an early age Mary had married, against her father's wishes, and gone West. She had been wild, headstrong and ungovernable from childhood. She made it too warm for her husband in a short time, and he deserted her, then she became a nameless wanderer.

Their father was now dead, and in his will he had left three quarters of all his wealth to Lucy, and one-quarter to Mary—if she should return at any time within two years after his death to claim it. If not, all was to go to Lucy. Mary's husband was one Frank Tremont—whom we have seen as Joel Hicks, and he, hearing of this will, set out to find his wife. He failed, and then followed Lucy, who was also in search of her sister, in order that she might be generous with her and maybe redeem her.

In leaving home, Mary had stolen some valuable papers, which it was important Lucy should recover. The middle-aged man who traveled with her was her father's trusted private secretary, who would know these papers when he saw them—and which he finally did recognize, when Deadwood Dick restored them to Lucy. If these papers fell into the hands of Tremont, he would have power to oust both the sisters, and, by false swearing, place himself into possession of the property. His scheme was, to get the papers, put his wife out of the way, and marry Lucy; or, failing in that, to put both out of the way and swear that he had a son who was heir to all.

Pistol Polly's scheme, as has been shown clearly, was to remove all the others and come in for the wealth herself!

But Deadwood Dick had been in the field, and he had captured his Dead-Sure Game.

Pistol Polly killed herself, but the others got what they deserved.

THE END.

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